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CHARLEY
LAYTON
OR THE
TIMELY ESCAPE

1489 · f · 1633 ·

Charley Layton:

OR,

THE TIMELY ESCAPE.

BY

MARIANNE PARROTT.

AUTHOR OF

"Holy Women of Old," "Rough Rhymes," "May Chumleigh," &c., &c.

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.—Bargaining 1

II.—Philip Burls 7

III.—Charley's School Days 19

IV.—An unexpected Proposal 27

V.—Unprofitable Talk 39

VI.—The right use of School Lessons 48

VII.—Charley's Troubles 63

VIII.—Old Betty Tomkins 74

IX.—Mary's first Visit to the Grange 86

X.—Brightening Prospects 97

XI.—Charley Layton at Sixteen 105

XII.—Mary Layton in Service 117

XIII.—Joe finds Charley changed for the better ... 136

XIV.—Mr. Grantley is wanted 151

XV.—In after years 170

Charley and Mary Layton.

CHAPTER I.

BARGAINING.

Two country boys were talking together at the corner of a field; on a bank near them sat a little girl, with her lap full of wild flowers, which she was forming into three separate nosegays, warbling the while, in a low sweet voice, the words—

"I think when I hear that sweet story of old,
How Jesus came down amongst men,
When He called little children like lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with them then."

It was a Sabbath evening; yet no one would have guessed it from the conversation of these lads, for they were buying and selling. The elder of the two, Joe Higgins by name, was the possessor of an old pocket knife, which Charley Layton thought he should like to make his own; and as he held in his hand a purse containing a bright new shilling, Higgins, who had already had a good deal of work out of the knife, felt not only willing, but anxious, to exchange the

one for the other. Charley, however, was a cautious buyer, and he began by pointing out sundry defects in the article offered for sale.

"It's a shabby old thing, after all, Joe," said he; "hardly worth having at any price! What's the use now of your trying to hide it? I can see that great ugly crack in the handle."

"Crack! what crack?" asked Joe, turning the best side upwards, and rubbing the other up and down his sleeve to polish it. "I tell you it's a capital knife; so bright you may almost see your face in it, and as sharp as a razor. Look if it isn't." And, to prove its capabilities, he stooped down and began to shave the bark off a large log of wood that was resting against the bank.

"It cuts none too well, though, as I see," said the other, looking over his shoulder; "besides, that's the best blade."

"Well! and what if it is? Where else, I should like to know, would you get a first-rate two-blader like this for a paltry shilling?" returned Joe, plunging it still deeper into the hard substance before him.

"A shilling, indeed! why you don't suppose I'm going to give a shilling for an old worn-out thing like that, do you?" said Charley; "if you do, I'm a deal sharper fellow than you take me for! no! no! you hand me over sixpence and the knife, and this bright beauty is your's; but not else."

"Don't you wish ——" and Joe had proceeded thus far in his coarse rejection of his companion's offer, when he suddenly stopped short, for having, in

his displeasure, attempted to withdraw the knife a little too hastily, the blade snapped short off at the handle, and remained firmly fixed in the wood.

Charley burst into a loud laugh, as he dropped the shilling back into his purse; it was neither kind nor well-mannered of him; the next moment he felt it was not, and would gladly have recalled the laugh. But Joe heard only the taunting sound; he knew nothing of the regret that followed it; in a moment his face was flaming with passion, and uttering a fearful oath, he raised his arm to strike.

Now Joe Higgins was a strong boy, much stronger than Charley Layton; and as he was thoroughly in earnest in what he was about to do, it is likely that Charley might have come to grief, had not the little girl, whose attention had been aroused by Joe's bad language, started up and rushed between them.

"Come away, Charley! come away!" she cried, seizing her brother by the hand, and trying to drag him from the spot; "do not mind that bad boy; do not stay to talk with him; grandmother would not like it!"

"Nonsense, Mary! I wish you wouldn't interfere," said Charley, pushing her aside, though with more gentleness than might have been expected, for he too had a temper, or, as some would call it, a spirit of his own, as well as Joe, and this threatened attack upon him had thoroughly roused it. "Stand aside, Mary; I tell you I'm as good a man as he is any day, for all he's so big, and if he wants to fight I'm ready for him"; and he began to take off his jacket.

"You shall not, Charley! you must not," said Mary, vehemently. "Why, it's Sunday! what will grandmother say? Go away, you bad boy! you shan't touch him!" and the child clung closely to her brother with one small hand, while the other was stretched out, as if to ward off the expected blow.

But Joe seemed suddenly to have calmed down, for he was now stooping to fasten up his bootlace; and when he looked up again, although his face was still very red, his words were more conciliating.

"Well, Charley, I don't want to quarrel with you, 'specially Sundays; besides, we couldn't fight it out without scaring the little one there, and what's the use of doing that? so I'll keep my knife and you keep your money, and much good may it do you!" So saying, he turned and walked off in a direction opposite to that which led into the village, leaving Mary well pleased at his absence. Not so Charley; there was a disagreeable, mocking expression, in Joe's manner of taking leave, that grated on his ear; and then the idea of having been defended by his little sister, was not altogether a pleasant one; for a minute or two he felt the greatest possible desire to follow Higgins, renew the quarrel, and insist on fighting it out; but then came the thought that it was Sunday—a day which he had been taught from his earliest infancy to keep holy—and with a strong effort he succeeded in forcing back the rising passion, and gaining the mastery over his temper.

Charles and his sister had been on their way home from Church, when, much to Mary's disgust, they had

been joined by Joe Higgins, who had, in spite of her pulling and dragging Charley towards the road, persuaded him to return by a longer way through the fields; and they had not proceeded far, before they found themselves engaged first in a foolish conversation, and afterwards in a still more foolish quarrel.

"There! I'm so glad he's gone!" cried Mary, seeming to breathe more freely. "Come along, Charley; let us make haste home; Granny will be waiting tea! I wish you would never speak to that wicked boy; how can you, when he's so dirty and ugly, and says such bad words?"

In this Mary scarcely did poor Joe justice, for he was in reality rather a good-looking lad; but she was thinking of him as she had just before seen him, with his face distorted with passion, and the handsomest persons are ugly then. Charley was more generous in his anger; unfortunately for him he had lately become very intimate with Higgins, and he now spoke a word in his defence.

"I don't know that he's worse than other boys, though Granny thinks he is; to be sure he's a little over hasty when he's put out; but then I ought not to have laughed at him."

"Why did you laugh, then?" asked the matter-of-fact little girl; "but you should not be friends with him if Granny does not wish it! it's not right of you, Charley!"

Unlike many elder brothers of the same age, Charley shewed no displeasure at these home-thrusts of his faithful little monitor, and he did but answer,

"Well, she wont know about our being with him this afternoon, Mary; she must not, it would worry her so."

Mary looked a little puzzled. She was accustomed to think that Granny must know everything, and Charley, as he caught sight of her face, continued:

"At least she need not know if you don't tell her."

"But, suppose she asks me, what then?"

Aye, indeed, what then! Charley knew not how to answer this direct appeal, for not for worlds would he have taught his sister—his dear little innocent sister—to tell an untruth; so he could only say,

"I hope she will not ask anything about it;" and fortunately, as he thought, Mrs. Layton, who was watching for them at the gate, was too much charmed with Mary's beautiful nosegays, to think at the moment of anything else. Still Charley did not feel satisfied with himself, for had he not, for the first time in his life, something that he wished to conceal from his best friend? During the whole of the evening he was fidgetty and uncomfortable. Again and again his Grandmother had to reprove him, for want of attention while they were reading together, as was their custom; and although it very seldom happened that he lay awake many minutes after he got into bed, yet on that calm and peaceful Sabbath night, the Dutch clock in the sitting-room struck over and over again, before he could settle himself quietly to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

PHILIP BURLS.

CHARLES and Mary Layton were orphans; their father had once been a very respectable farm labourer, and had, from his boyhood, worked always under the same master; but, unfortunately, when he was about twenty-five years of age, he formed an acquaintance with a man whose influence and example produced a very unfavourable change in his habits.

Philip Burls was a native of the same village as Layton, but he had run away to sea when quite a lad, since which time he had been leading a wild, unsettled life, and having now, as it was supposed, got together a little money, had come home to spend it. During his long absence he had visited many countries and seen many strange sights. Like most travellers he was fond of relating his adventures, which he knew how to intersperse with a good deal of low humour, and as he was a good mimic, had a rude, uncultivated taste for music, and could perform some clever conjuring tricks, he soon became very popular, and generally managed to draw a large party round him at the little public house where he spent most of his evenings.

Among those who were attracted from their homes

to listen to "Phil Burls's strange stories about foreign parts," was James Layton, then the husband of an interesting young wife, and the father of an only child, our little friend Charley; at first it was but once or twice a week that he stole away to the "Rising Sun," as soon as supper was over, just to hear, as he said, "what that comical fellow Burls was talking about to-night;" but a taste for low pleasures is almost sure to grow with its indulgence. Soon it came to be the one evening spent at home and the many at the public house, while the neglected wife and child were left to console themselves, as best they could, for his absence.

The tale of a downward course like that on which poor Layton had thus entered is soon told; first there was the reeling and unsteady walk, the frequent oath, the rude or profane jest; then his face grew pale and haggard, his figure bent, his dress untidy; labour, once so easy, now seemed hard to him, and his work was either ill done or quite neglected. His master of course found fault; he had but too much cause to do so; but reproof was ill received, and so a good place, and worse still, a good character were lost; then what remained to the unhappy drunkard but a poverty-stricken home and a broken-hearted wife.

Thus matters went on for two or three years, then came the end, so far at least as this world was concerned; beyond it we are not permitted to look; we only know what is written in the Bible, that "Drunkards shall not inherit the Kingdom of God."*

* 1 Cor. vi. 10.

His little girl was but a few weeks old when one evening Layton approached his wife, now far gone in consumption, to receive from her the carefully hoarded shilling, with which she had intended to buy some new socks for her all but barefooted Charley; but the day for reproaches was over with her, and she gave it up without a murmur, though a tear stood in her eye as she handed it to him: little Charley saw it and drew nearer to her side, for he dearly loved his mother; he loved his father too, bad parent as he was, and now as he turned from one to the other, his little bosom heaved with childish sorrow, and looking up earnestly in his father's face he said, "Don't go away Daddy, stay with mother and Charley and pretty baby; do Daddy, pray do, stay with us all night long."

The father's conscience smote him as he listened to this innocent appeal; catching the boy up in his arms and tenderly kissing him, he replied,

"Not to-night my lad, Daddy must go to-night, but it shall be the last time, Charley; Mary lass," he continued, turning to his wife, "cheer up; I promise you I'll have done with 'em all to night, I've been but a bad husband of late, but I've made up my mind; to-morrow we'll begin a new life together." He put down his boy, kissed his wife and babe, and was gone.

Layton entered the public house in an excited and irritable state, dissatisfied with himself and with all about him; at first he refused to drink, but Burls rallied him on his "squeamishness," as he called it, and mockingly asked if he was going to turn milksop. Layton gave a sharp reply, but seizing the offered

mug, drank deeper than ever. The flame of discord being thus lighted up, there was no one there kind and prudent enough to put it out; two hours later the whole of the party found themselves engaged in a drunken brawl, in the course of which many wicked words were spoken and many bad thoughts indulged; but Layton, more maddened than the rest, was the loudest and the worst. At length he suddenly started up and challenged one of his companions to fight; but he knew not how powerless he had become; as he took the first step forward he staggered and fell, striking his head violently against the sharp corner of a bench; the blow produced a concussion of the brain. His terrified companions, partly sobered by the shock, raised him in their arms and carried him home; but before they reached his house the spirit of James Layton had passed to its account.

His wife, meanwhile, lying on her miserable bed, from which the last blanket had been sold weeks before, was wearily watching for his return, when suddenly an unusual noise was heard from below. Fearing for her little Charley, who had crept down stairs "to meet Daddy," she sprang hastily up and entered the lower room just in time to see the lifeless body of her husband borne through the opposite door; the sudden shock was too much for her already weakened frame to bear: she fell into a succession of fainting fits, from which she only rallied long enough at a time to place her infant in the arms of her husband's mother, and to entreat her, by the love she had borne her son, never to lose sight of his

children, but to train them up in the fear of the Lord and to do her best to keep Charley especially from falling into those evil habits which had been so fatal to his father. The sorrow-stricken old woman, kneeling by her daughter's side, accepted the solemn trust, and before another sun went down the new-made widow had herself ceased to live.

An event so sad and so unlooked for did not fail to produce a most painful sensation throughout the parish; the sins of poor Layton's later years were, for the moment, forgotten, and he was thought of only as the bright happy looking young man who had once been a general favorite. On the day of the funeral, when the husband and wife were to be laid in one grave, every countenance wore an appearance of gloom, and nearly the whole of the inhabitants followed their remains to the churchyard.

As for the orphan children, they became objects of universal sympathy, being regarded as a sort of sacred legacy in which all were more or less interested; but the best intentioned people soon get over sorrows that do not immediately affect themselves; and although Widow Layton continued, for a few weeks, to receive liberal gifts from the rich and much active kindness from the poor amongst her neighbours, both, by degrees, fell off, and the poor old woman was made to feel that if her grandchildren were to be kept from the Union, it must be by her own exertions alone.

She was at this time about sixty-five years of age; had been a strong and active woman in her day,

having, since her early widowhood, supported herself, and for many years her son, by the labour of her hands: but of late sorrow had told severely upon her, and deprived her of much of her former energy: she had, indeed, to the very last done what she could for her son's family; but it was of little use for her to toil, day and night, to earn money, which, after the purchase of the barest necessaries, was sure to find its way to the "Rising Sun"; and it was the thought of the little real benefit which her work conferred on those dearest to her, that made what had once been a pleasure, now seem a burden.

The terrible death of her son, and that of his wife following so closely upon it, nearly overwhelmed her; but fortunately, perhaps, for herself, the forlorn condition of the orphan children left her little time for the indulgence of grief. With the necessity for exertion came a fresh supply of courage, and happily it was courage that sprung from a right source, for Widow Layton was a Christian, and in the course of her long and troubled life she had often had occasion to acknowledge the truth of words which, together with many others of the same kind, she had learned at her mother's knee some sixty years before, and had ever since kept treasured up in her memory. "Though the Lord cause grief, He will have compassion: according to the multitude of His mercies." And as she shut herself into her cottage, alone with her helpless charge, there arose to her mind a still more encouraging promise, which seemed at the moment to have been made expressly for her.

"Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive: and let thy widows trust in Me."

"Yes, Lord; in Thee will I trust!" was the language of her heart; and from that moment her load seemed lighter to bear.

Her first care was for her three years' old Charley; It was chiefly on his account that she had given up her home in the village, and taken a small cottage in a rather lonely spot, half a mile distant; for there she thought she should be able to keep him more to herself, and out of the way of the neglected, disorderly children that are so often to be met with in the public streets; and yet, without companions, the great difficulty seemed to be how she was to keep him amused, for she knew that constant and hard work must be her own portion, and that the care of the infant would occupy most of the time she should be able to spare from the wash-tub and the ironing-board. Suddenly a happy thought struck her; and placing Charley on a stool beside her, she took the baby in her arms, and made him notice how weak and helpless the little creature was, how unable to sit up alone, to feed or take care of itself, or even to express its wants otherwise than by a feeble cry, and then placing it in the cradle, she made him rock it gently until the plaintive sound had ceased, and the infant had fallen into a sweet sleep. Charley felt, as his grandmother well knew he would feel, both proud and happy in his power to soothe and comfort his little sister. "And you know, my darling," said the old woman, as the tears chased

each other down her cheeks, "that when you were a baby, you had a tender mother to watch over you, and a loving father, too; but this poor little lamb has nobody but you and me, Charley."

"And the great God, Granny," put in Charley, as he climbed on to her knee, and began to kiss away the tears. "Don't you mind poor Mammy's saying, when she was so ill, that God would be sure to take care of us, because He'd promised to?"

"Aye, aye! and so He will, a deal better than I can," said the Widow, self rebuked for her momentary want of trust; "but you and I must help one another for all that, Charley: the good Book says—'Bear ye one another's burdens'—and some day or other my boy will understand what those words mean!"

Charley looked as if he did not understand them yet, but he had easily caught the more simple lesson of the two; from that moment, his favorite seat was beside baby's cradle, and a close and careful watch he kept there; not even a fly could approach it unnoticed; while the infant slept, the boy's very breath was hushed, that its slumber might not be disturbed; but at the slightest movement, the tiny hand was gently pressed in his, and his rosy cheek nestled itself down on the pillow, while his lips sent forth a low murmuring sound, that never failed to soothe the infant back into forgetfulness of all its little troubles. Did a neighbour ever venture near to look at the innocent sleeper, it was amusing to see how cleverly Charley would contrive to wedge in his little form

between the intruder and his precious charge; and the eager anxious glance he cast from one to the other, shewed that he was prepared to do battle in its defence, had any harm been intended.

It was a proud day for the little man when he was first allowed to hold baby in his lap, and a still prouder one when, as a reward for past carefulness, he was told to take her out in the sunshine, and sit with her on the little patch of grass that grew outside the cottage door. Soon the little creature—Tiny they called her, she was so very small, and it was years before she lost the name—learned to know and love her brother, and she would laugh and crow, and stretch out her little arms at the most distant sound of his voice. He it was who encouraged her to take her first step alone; a kiss from him being the reward of her courage. The first intelligible sound she uttered was, "Tar," the first sentence she put together, "Dood budder Tarley," and never was speech listened to with more wonder and delight. From the moment baby began to walk about in earnest, the brother and sister were seldom apart; indeed, Mary's habit of following her brother wherever he went, caused her grandmother two or three severe frights. One day she was suddenly missed, and after an anxious search, was found toddling along the public road looking for Charley, whom she had somehow lost sight of. Another time they were both missing, and when found, the boy was sitting on his parents' grave with baby on his lap, he trying to make her understand that it was there poor mother was sleep-

ing so sound, that nobody could wake her, and that her soul was gone to live with Jesus up somewhere in the sky.

In former days Widow Layton had enjoyed a high reputation as a clear starcher and getter up of fine linen, and when it was understood that she wished to resume the occupation, work poured in on all sides; to many women it would have seemed very hard thus, as it were, to begin life again at an age when most people are thinking of giving it up; but it did not seem so to her; she had a mission to fulfil, and as is generally the case with those who, walking humbly with their God, desire to follow the path which He makes plain before them, strength equal to her need was given.

And so year after year the old woman laboured on, and the children grew and flourished, and daily wound themselves closer and closer round her heart; perhaps of the two Charley was her favorite, though she never acknowledged it, even to herself. But he had been the first to climb her knee, and call her Granny; that name so sweet to aged ears; nor were there other reasons wanting for this preference, for he was the very image of what his father had been at the same age; and who that knew that father's history could wonder, that the affectionate mother should, while tracing the likeness, love to look back upon the past, and forgetting the days that had come between, live over again the happy promise of her son's childhood; besides, Charley Layton was a boy to be loved for his own sake; he had a healthy, happy-looking

face, eyes that sparkled with fun and good humour, an affectionate disposition, and a very tender heart.

Some of the neighbours, who occasionally looked in at the cottage on their way to the Grange or the Manor Farm, had been heard to accuse the widow of over-indulging her grandchildren, and making them think too much of themselves; but villagers, we know, are apt sometimes to look at their neighbours' faults through a magnifying glass; and we cannot help suspecting, that it was the order and neatness that prevailed in the little cottage, and the quiet and respectful behaviour of the brother and sister, that provoked the charge, for it was certainly remarkable, that the fault-finders were generally the mistresses of untidy homes, and the mothers of unruly children. Be this, however, as it might, Charley at seven years old was a good and useful boy, by no means without faults—as we shall find out by and by—but always anxious to please and help his grandmother, who could already send him on an errand to the village without any fear of his loitering by the way, and trust him besides to do many little things for her, requiring more steadiness than is generally met with in boys of his age.

We have already seen what good care he took of his little sister; and whenever he felt inclined to be naughty, his grandmother had only to remind him of the bad example he was setting Mary, to call back the smile of good humour to his cheek, and to send him forward with a bound to catch his sister in his arms, and tell her that "the wicked spirit had been

trying to get into poor Charley's heart, but that Granny and he had fought with it and sent it away," all of which Mary understood; and when her turn came to be naughty, she would fight against it too, and often smile through her tears, to convince Charley that she was a "dood dal now."

Thus passed the first four years of their orphan life, and then a trial came, Charley had to go to school! It was a hard necessity, and both children rebelled against it. Even Granny felt it hard, for how she would miss her handy little helper; but she had neither time nor ability to teach him more than the very little he had already learned of her, and she was too unselfish to allow her own comfort and convenience to stand in the way of his interests. So one fine Spring morning, Mary, much to her displeasure, saw her brother neatly dressed, and with a bag, to hold his books, slung over his shoulder, take his departure for the village school. It was a sad separation, short as it was to be, and it drew forth tears on both sides; but, after a few days, Charley had found out that it was cowardly for boys to shed tears, so when the next parting came, he consoled his sister with a bunch of daisies and buttercups, and then with a farewell kiss and jump ran manfully away; if the tears would flow in spite of himself, he had at least the comfort of knowing that nobody could see them.

CHAPTER III.

CHARLEY'S SCHOOLDAYS.

And now for Charley's school days! Many a young eye will brighten, and many an ear grow attentive at that sound; and yet we have not very much to tell about them.

Most of our young readers are, happily for them, acquainted with the inside of a village school-room; they can picture to themselves the lofty ceiling and dingy walls, the battered and ink-stained desks, with their twenty or thirty copy books ranged along them, some so neatly and carefully filled, others bearing the marks of the dunce's fingers on their disfigured pages. They can see, too, or fancy they see, the gaily-painted maps, and the board containing that "tiresome multiplication table," that seems so difficult at first, and yet becomes so very easy when a little pains have been taken to understand it. All these things are familiar enough to village children; and so are the long rows of boys and girls, some with black hair, some with brown, some with rosy cheeks and merry faces, others looking pale and cross, and very naughty; some clean and neatly-dressed, others unwashed and slovenly; but all—except the dunces—busily employed, now sitting at the desks writing copies or

working sums, now ranged in classes reading or spelling, or listening to pleasant stories of far-off lands, brought near on purpose for little tarry-at-home travellers. Well, then, it was into such a room as this that Charley Layton was now introduced; at first the scene appeared very strange to him; he had been brought up in such a lonely, quiet home, that the sight of so many lads collected together made him feel shy, if not frightened; but this soon wore off, for they all looked kindly on the little stranger, and he was naturally of a social disposition, so that in a few days he felt quite at home amongst them, and enjoyed the half-hour's game in the play-ground as well as any lad there.

Unfortunately there were in this school, as there are in most others, two classes of scholars, the good and the bad, the idle and the industrious. Now, one of the faults from which, as we have already said, Charley was not quite free, was that he allowed himself to be led by others, without waiting to think whether they were leading him right or wrong. For the first few weeks, indeed, all went well with him; for the master, who was a very kind man, took a great deal of pains with his pupils, and Charley, whose great desire it was to be able, as soon as possible, to spare Granny's eyes by reading the Bible to her, and making out her washing bills, tried very hard to get on; but when he had once overcome the first difficulties and began to read a little, and to make sundry odd looking characters, which his conceit led him to suppose were the letters of the alphabet,

although in reality they bore but very little resemblance to them, he grew careless and self-sufficient, and sometimes ventured to think that he knew better than his teacher; this, then, was the time for bad boys to take advantage of him. Now there was in the same class a very bad boy named Mark Simmons, and it often happened that he and Charley were placed side by side. Mark was an idle, disobedient lad, who forgot that there is a time to work, as well as a time to play, and who, therefore, chose to play at all times when the master's eye was not upon him; and we are sorry to be obliged to confess, that Charley—who knew better—would often let his book fall to the ground, or his slate lie unused beside him, while he amused himself, either in examining the contents of Mark's pocket as he spread them out before him, or in playing mischievous tricks to disturb their more industrious schoolfellows: and this, though bad enough—for disobedience is always bad—generally led to something worse; for when the master, roused by some sudden movement, would turn suddenly round to see what was going on, Mark would snatch up his book, put on a demure look, and seem so busy at his lessons, that he generally escaped detection; while Charley would feel so much ashamed that his guilty look was sure to betray him, and so he would often be punished while the other escaped. This seemed rather hard upon him; yet we confess, for our own part, that we would rather have been him with his tender conscience and tell-tale cheek, and especially with the honest heart that scorned to

act a lie, than to have escaped a dozen canings in the way in which Mark escaped them.

But the caning on these occasions was the least part of his punishment; for Charley, let him try as he might, never could conceal from his grandmother the fact of his having been in disgrace. His first look at her, as he entered the cottage, was sure to betray him; even little Mary could see that all was not right, and it generally ended in his bursting into tears, and telling the whole story of his wrong doing. It is true that his grandmother thought this punishment enough, and perhaps, in her heart, she rejoiced to see that his boyish faults of heedlessness and inattention were more than atoned for by his candour and love of truth; a little loving counsel, therefore, followed often by a few simple words of prayer that he might be kept from evil, would seal her forgiveness, and send him back to school the next day with the determination to be one of the best boys there, a resolution he would manfully keep, until some new temptation overcame him.

Of an evening it was Charley's delight to teach Mary what he had himself learned during the day; and although there was not much method in his manner of giving instruction, it was surprising how quickly the little girl learned to read and spell, and how readily she caught up the hymns and texts he taught her; whether this was most to the credit of the teacher or the taught, it is hard to say, but in either case they were equally well pleased. The widow, meanwhile, looked on and smiled, as they sat

at her feet, Charley with his arm round his sister's neck, while she, with her earnest, innocent face upturned to his, seemed to drink in every word that fell from his lips: all was love on his part, all simple faith on hers!

How many an elder brother might thus make the rugged entrance to the paths of knowledge smoother to the little sister, who sits smiling away the long winter evenings by his side.

When Charley had been at school about a year, a circumstance occurred there which, though it seemed to have little to do with him at the time, was not without its influence on his after life. One of the bigger boys was publicly turned out for misconduct. Joe Higgins, with whom we have already become acquainted in the first chapter, was one of those unhappy lads, of whom there are generally a few in every village; his father was one of Burls's wild companions; his mother was an idle, gossiping woman, who thought much more about the Sunday adornment of her own person, than the week-day comforts of her husband and children; the dwelling, therefore, of this unworthy couple, might form a shelter, but it certainly did not form a home to their children in the true sense of the word, for there were no home comforts to be found in it, while the worst possible example was set them. There was no fear of God within those walls; His Word was never read there; His day was never kept; His sacred name was only used in blasphemy. What wonder, then, that their boys grew up idle, saucy, and profane;

their girls slatternly and unsteady. Of the former one had enlisted, one was at sea, and Joe was the youngest; he had been badly managed from his cradle; sometimes his mother encouraged him in every vicious habit, at others she treated him with the greatest harshness, often having recourse to blows to enforce his obedience to her own ungovernable will. Sad to say, he could neither love nor respect his mother, but he feared her, and always kept as much as possible out of her way. As for his father he seldom saw him, for Joe Higgins the elder was often away from home for weeks together, working, as he said, for farmers at a distance, but engaged, as many thought, in much less lawful courses.

Joe, when not at school, spent his time wandering about with other idle boys of the neighbourhood, constantly getting into mischief, often into danger, yet always escaping unhurt; though very dull at his books, he was not without a certain sharpness which, together with his good humour, only interrupted by violent but short fits of passion, won for him more indulgence towards his faults than he had a right to meet with.

It will be easily understood that Joe Higgins, such as we have described him, had never been a very promising pupil, but Mr. Collins, the Master, knew that it was his duty to correct a boy's faults, and not to reject him because of them; and for more than two years he had been sparing no pains to instil better principles into the heart of this neglected,

ill-trained boy: but what effect could a few hours of instruction and restraint be expected to have upon a character that was daily becoming more hardened under the influence of evil example; gentle measures and severe ones had been tried in turn, but equally in vain; day after day Joe was in disgrace; the business of the school was constantly being interrupted, sometimes by acts of open rebellion, at others by sly tricks, which he was in the habit of playing off upon any one who came in his way. Even the respectable Mr. Collins himself was sometimes held up to the ridicule of his own scholars; threats of public expulsion were held out, but Joe never believed they would be acted upon; and so he went on, getting worse and worse, until one day, having openly set the Master at defiance, he suddenly found himself seized hold of by the strong arm of one of the managers of the school, who happening to come up at the moment, and to see what was going on, took the matter into his own hands. Joe was forcibly led into the middle of the school-room, and silence having been obtained, he was addressed in accents of mingled kindness and severity, his books and slate were slung across his shoulder, and with a few parting words of solemn warning, he was put forth from the room, never to return! The sentence was received at first with a laugh of derision; but the deep flush that rose to his face, and the instant drooping of his head, shewed that, hardened as he had seemed, he deeply felt the disgrace.

As the door was about to close upon him he turned

round, to look once more upon his schoolfellows; and the last view he caught, was that of Charley Layton gazing after him with his eyes filled with tears.

And why did Charley shed tears over the disgrace of this wild, disobedient boy? We know not, unless it was that he had a kind and feeling heart, which sympathized in the sorrows of others; it might be too, that he was thinking of what he should have had to suffer if he had been in Joe's place, and how he could ever have gone home to his grandmother and Mary with the tale of his disgrace. As it was, but little else was talked of between his sister and himself for the next few days, for Mary was never tired of asking questions about "the bad boy who was never to go to school any more, because he liked best to be a dunce."

After this event a great change for the better was observed in several boys, and especially in Charley Layton. Mark Simmons could never again tempt him to be idle, when he had his lesson to learn or his sum to do; and if he sometimes felt a little inclined to be naughty, he not only tried very hard to subdue the feeling, but took his grandmother's advice, and silently prayed that God would help him to do so.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL.

One morning several weeks after Joe's dismissal from the school, Charley had been sent by his grandmother on an errand into the village, when, just as he was setting off home again, his former schoolfellow sauntered up to him with his hands in his pockets.

"I say, you Layton, I want you to come and play at marbles with me!"

"Marbles! when? where?" asked Charley, hastily, for he was taken by surprise, never having spoken to Joe before out of the schoolroom, and very seldom in it, for they were in different classes, and always sat in different parts of the room.

"Where! why here to be sure, and now this moment!" and taking a handful of marbles from his pocket, he began placing them on the footpath along which persons were continually passing. Now Charley had never thought of asking his grandmother the question, but he felt pretty sure that she would not like him to play at marbles in the public street; and he said so.

"Nonsense! she won't know anything about it; and if she does, what's the harm?"

And to be sure Charley did not know what was

the harm, only somehow it did not seem quite respectable. He should like a game at marbles very much, he thought, but then it would be a deal pleasanter to play at them in the little square that separated their cottage from the public road; besides, it fortunately occurred to him just at that moment, that Granny would be waiting for the buttons to sew on his new jacket, so he told Joe very firmly that he could not stay to play with him.

"All the worse for you then," said the other, repocketing his marbles; "I'm glad I'm not kept so hard at work, anyhow!"

"I don't work hard," said Charley, laughing. "I wish I was old enough to work, and then poor Granny wouldn't have to slave as she does to keep me: but I say, Higgins, why did you ask me to play with you?" he continued, for Joe, not being able to detain him, was walking along by his side.

"'Caus I like you," said Joe.

There was something in this answer that made its way straight to the affectionate heart of Charley Layton. He looked round at his companion with more interest than he had ever felt in him before; he was rough and ill-dressed, but there was a merry, good humoured expression in his face, and in spite of the circumstances in which he had last seen him, Charley felt that he liked him too.

"You was sorry when I was turned out of school, and you was the only one as was, though a great many of 'em are as bad as I am."

"Well, I was sorry for you, and that's the truth,"

said Charley, "and I knew you'd be sorry enough yourself afterwards."

"O, I don't know for the matter of that; they're a deal too strict there to please me; I like more fun, I do."

"But we must learn sometimes," said Charley; "and how can we learn anything if we're always at play?"

"O, you're very wise, you are," rejoined Higgins. "Well, you may stick to the learning if you fancy it; but, for my part, I've had enough of them school ways——. But I say, Layton, d'ye see yon hare? there she runs across that field, I'll be off after her, see if I won't!" and without another word he almost flew away in pursuit of something which Charley had not even noticed, leaving him in the greatest amazement.

"What a strange fellow he is," thought Charley to himself; "to see him run like that now, would any one suppose that he was so lazy at school? but it's very kind of him to take such a fancy to me, that it is!" and again remembering the buttons he also began to run, and was soon at home.

From this time he scarcely ever went into the village without being joined by Joe Higgins, who seemed to be always standing about with his hands in his pockets, either talking to other boys of the same stamp as himself, or else lounging against the old elm tree, which stood on the spot generally known as "The Idle Corner"; but though Charley had no objection to talk a little with Joe as he

walked beside him, and was sometimes a good deal amused with his funny speeches and ways, he never suffered himself to be tempted to do anything that he thought his grandmother would disapprove; so that when the game of marbles was again proposed, Joe had to accompany him into the little square already mentioned, where they had a very pleasant game together. When it was over, Charley thought he could not well do other than ask him indoors, and although Widow Layton was somewhat surprised, and not altogether pleased, at the entrance of so unexpected a guest, she was too hospitable not to invite him to share Charley's tea, which stood ready on the table.

The old lady knew nothing of Joe, but what she had heard from her grandson, but she did know that his parents bore a very indifferent character, and that, she thought, might account for his untidy appearance, as well as for his ill conduct at school; yet she was sorry that Charley should have formed an acquaintance with him, and she resolved to break it off at once. As for Mary, from the moment Joe entered the house, she seemed tongue-tied; she seated herself on a low stool at the greatest possible distance from him, and glanced fixedly at him from under her long eyelashes, while her usually smooth forehead contracted itself into an angry frown; poor Joe was evidently ill at ease under such a close scrutiny; he fidgetted about on his chair, spilt his tea, and when asked if he would take more, answered, "No, thank you," when it was plain that he meant, "Yes, if you

please"; in short, he was glad to get away as soon as he possibly could.

"I'm so glad that untidy boy is gone, Charley!" said Mary, as soon as the door had closed on him; "whatever did he come here for, I wonder?"

"He came to play at marbles with me, Mary," replied her brother, good humouredly.

"And could not I play at marbles with you instead?" asked Mary, indignantly.

"Why, you know marbles is not a girl's game."

"Isn't it? then I wish I was a boy, and then you wouldn't have to bring him here; but ball is a girl's game, and I can play at that; why would not ball do as well as marbles?"

"Because boys like to play at a great many different games, and you girls only care for a few!"

"O dear, I wish I was a boy, that I do!" again said Mary, in a disconsolate tone of voice.

"I believe Mary is right, Charley," said his grandmother, seriously: "this lad Higgins does not seem the sort of playfellow I should like you to have; his dress and manners are both against him, and a boy who has been turned away from school for ill conduct, is not a very safe companion for one who wishes to keep up his own character there."

"But Granny, Joe says it's because they kept him too strict that he never got on at school."

"Of course he does, and that's what bad boys always say; they think everybody strict who tries to cure them of their faults. I should be sorry to judge the lad harshly, but I must know more of him

before I allow you to make a playfellow of him. Remember, Charley," continued the old woman, and her voice trembled as she spoke, "that 'He who walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall be destroyed.'"

Charley grew very serious as he listened to these words; there was something in his grandmother's manner that touched him. He remembered, too, that he had already heard Joe use language that he was sure it was not right for any boy, nor man either, to use; and as he knew that "Granny" was generally right in what she said, he determined the next time he saw Higgins at a distance, he would turn another way, so as not to meet him; and as he was at school the greater part of the day, and Mrs. Layton took care not to send him into the village of an evening, he and Joe had very little acquaintance with each other for the next year or two; for whether it was that Mary's searching glance had really frightened him, or that the quiet habits of the cottage were not to his taste, the latter never repeated his visit there.

Time, meanwhile, passed quickly away, and Charley and his sister grew older, and so, alas! did their grandmother. Her white hair became whiter, and her wrinkled face still more wrinkled; her hand shook as she poured out the tea, and she was often obliged to sit down to rest in the midst of her ironing. She could no longer walk to Church twice on Sunday, and Charley had to help her lift the heavy old family Bible—the only relic of a past generation—on to the table at which she sat to

conduct the evening worship, that being a duty never neglected in Widow Layton's cottage. These signs of growing weakness were not lost upon either of the children, who, young as they were, often felt grieved that poor Granny should have to work so hard for them.

It was when Charley was about twelve years old, that his grandmother was seized with a violent attack of rheumatism, which for awhile laid her quite aside, and obliged her to hire a woman to do the washing, and this, of course, took away most of her profits. When, therefore, Mr. Bradford, of the Manor Farm, with whom his father had worked so long, offered to give Charley employment, which would bring them in a few shillings weekly, his grandmother was glad to accept the offer. He could now read and write very nicely, and had made considerable progress in ciphering; was tall and strong of his age, and not at all sorry, as boys indeed seldom are, to exchange the schoolroom and its restraints for the comparative freedom of the fields, besides, it would be a grand thing, he thought, to be able to add his mite to dear Granny's hard-earned pittance; but Mary, who in her turn now went to school, did not at all like this new arrangement. She feared, that when Charley came to be away from them all day and every day, he would make new friends and form fresh tastes; in short, that she and Granny would no longer be all in all to him, and Mary was a true woman, although but a very little one as yet; she did not care to share the treasure of her brother's heart with others.

Perhaps Widow Layton herself was not without fears of the same kind; but if so, hers arose from a far less selfish motive; her past sad experience had taught her to dread for him, above all other dangers, the influence of bad example; and her heart sank as she thought of her yet pure-minded Charley being exposed to the evil communications of those who not only delight in the ways of sin themselves, but are never so happy as when tempting others to walk in them. In this, however, as in every other anxious trial of her life, this good and pious woman had recourse to prayer, and frequent and earnest were the petitions she sent up to heaven in her boy's behalf.

At first Mary was well pleased to find that her brother's new occupation made very little change in their manner of life. He went out a little earlier in the morning, and returned a little later at night; in all other respects she saw nearly as much of him as she had ever done since he went to school; his duties at the Farm were light, and the employment was not only new, but pleasant to him; and regularly at half-past six he came in full of life and spirits, often bringing with him some treasure or other, which he had found and garnered up during the day, to please and amuse his sister; sometimes it was a bird's nest, always a deserted one by the bye, of a form and construction different to any she had seen before, or a bunch of wild flowers, unlike those which grew immediately round their own home. Once he brought her a pebble he had picked up while driving plough, and which was so beautifully coloured and

veined, that it needed but the skill of the polisher to make it like one which, set as a brooch, had been carelessly left in a collar sent to the wash. Another time he came in with his hands full of a strange-looking plant, which he had just seen spreading itself like delicate scarlet network over a whole field of clover, but which, beautiful as it was to look at, his master treated as a troublesome weed, called "Dodder," upon hearing which, their grandmother, who was rather fond of pointing a moral, observed, that there were many people in this world, as well as many flowers, who, under a fair outside, did a great deal of mischief.

As the summer advanced there was more work to be done at the Farm, and Charley, like the rest of the labourers, had to stay later. This fretted Mary, and brought out some of her weak points, for she, like other little girls, was very far from being a perfect character; she had not yet learned, for instance, to bear patiently those little every-day trials, to which persons of all ages are subject, and she was apt to give way to fits of peevishness when things did not turn out quite to her mind, especially where her brother was concerned; if he did not make his appearance at the very moment she expected him, she would station herself by the door to watch for him, forgetting, as her grandmother often told her, that she was not only wasting her time, but making it appear twice as long; and she was sometimes so unreasonable as to grow quite angry with Charley, although she knew very well that he was kept

away, not for his own pleasure, but by his master's business.

One evening she had been watching thus a long while, until finding her patience quite worn out, she was turning indoors with the fretful remark, that she knew Charley didn't care the least about coming home now, when she suddenly spied him some distance off, in company with another lad, at which sight she was so foolish as to feel quite jealous, lest he should have found a companion whom he liked better than he did her. What, then, was her consternation to find, as the pair drew nearer, that this dreaded rival was no other than Joe Higgins himself.

Mary had never seen this boy, except at a distance, since he had drank tea at the cottage years before; but she had by no means got over the dislike she then took to him, and now she drew herself back within the doorway, with her heart as full of bitterness towards him, as it was capable of feeling towards anyone. Joe, however, seemed to have quite as little wish to encounter Mary, as she had to meet him, for directly he caught sight of her he bade Charley good night, and turned off to his home by a back way, although to do so led him a long way round. Charley entered the cottage as usual in high spirits, and as it was the night when he brought home his week's wages to pour into his grandmother's lap, Mary felt so proud at the thought of her brother helping to support them, that all her ill humour gave way at once, and the evening passed so pleasantly, that Joe Higgins was forgotten.

But how did it happen, it will be asked, that Charley had renewed his acquaintance with this lad, without telling his grandmother of it? We believe, then, that he had no wish to keep it from her, but had really forgotten to mention that Joe had been taken on to work at the farm a few days before, and that they had thus been occasionally, though not often, thrown together.

The years which had worked such changes in the young Laytons and their grandmother, had not been without their effect on Higgins; and Charley, who was just of an age to be led away by appearances, and who had never forgotten Joe's expression of regard for himself, believed that the change that had taken place in him was all for the better. His father was dead, and his mother had married again and removed to a distant village, whither her son, who cared little for his mother, and still less for his step-father, refused to accompany them. Being thus left to earn his own living, Joe found himself obliged to work, and as the woman, with whom he now lodged, took better care of him than his own mother had done, his clothes, though still put on in a slouching, slovenly manner, were much less ragged and dirty than they had formerly been; it was quite true that he had years before, and for the reason he had given, taken a fancy to Charley, and wished to make a companion of him, but after his visit to the cottage, and his introduction to good, respectable Mrs. Layton, and still more to the possessor of those wonderfully-piercing eyes, that had seemed to look through him

as he sat, he had cared less about it, and would most likely never have sought Charley again, had they not been thrown together at the Farm. Now, however, the wish to be friends with him returned; but Joe was cunning enough to see, that if he meant to win for himself a place in Charley's good graces, he must seem to be different from what he really was; and thus it happened, that although much given to the use of bad language, he generally managed to restrain his tongue when talking with him; so that Charley really thought he had got the better of this and other bad habits, and that, therefore, his grandmother would no longer object to their being on friendly terms with each other.

We have now brought our story up to the Sunday evening on which it commenced, when Joe having, for the first time, conquered his fear of Mary, joined the brother and sister on their way from Church; the purpose and end of that meeting have been already told.

CHAPTER V.

UNPROFITABLE TALK.

It was now two months since Charley had renewed his acquaintance with Higgins, and nearly three weeks since the affair of the knife: their quarrel had soon been made up, for boys seldom bear malice, and they had met two or three days afterwards as if nothing had occurred to interrupt their newly-formed friendship; nearly every evening since they had walked home in company, and often met several times in the course of the day. Sometimes it happened that they were set to work side by side, and then it was not to be expected but that there would be much talk between them. Still, Higgins, true to the resolution he had taken, kept strict watch over his tongue, and it was only now and then that a word slipped out, which would make his companion start and look uneasy, when he would instantly check himself and seem quite sorry; but though his language, while in Charley's company, was not openly profane, his conversation was anything but such as it is good to listen to, for "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh," and we may as well expect to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles, as to hear wise words come forth from a foolish and wicked

heart; but Charley was young and inexperienced, and although his grandmother was constantly telling him that he would gain no good from Higgins, he was not always so careful as he should have been to close his ears against his evil counsels.

"I say Charley, how precious dull you must be out here all by yourself," had Joe said to him one evening as they came in sight of the cottage; "why don't you come along with us and have some fun; I wouldn't be you to work hard all day and mope about by myself of an evening was it ever so."

"You're mistaken there, Joe," said Charley, "I never mope about at home, I'm too busy for that; I've always plenty to do to help grandmother, and when she's done with me Mary and I have lots of ways of amusing ourselves.

"O that's it, is it," said Joe, in a mocking tone, "then the secret's out at last; he stays at home to play with his little sister; well if that doesn't beat me out, how a fine spirited fellow like you can be satisfied with girl's play; not but what that little one of yours is as brave as most, for all she's so puny looking," continued Joe, as he saw Charley turn red, "but for all that girl's play isn't boy's play, as you'd find out if you'd come with us, wouldn't he, Jim?"

"I should think he would just, and no mistake," was the disagreeable answer, given in a still more disagreeable tone. The speaker was a tall, ungainly lad, called Jim Larkin, who passed in the village for being half-witted, though many suspected that his silliness was put on to mask his cunning. Charley

had never been in this boy's company until this evening, when he had come suddenly upon them as they were walking home together, and accosted Joe in such a manner as proved them to be on intimate terms with each other.

"But if I'm happy and contented at home, what does it signify?" asked Charley, glancing at the intruder with no loving eye. "If I was to go running about of an evening my grandmother would never hardly see me, and she wouldn't like that I know; why, Joe, she has taken care of me ever since I was three years old."

"And so you mean her to go on taking care of you till you're thirty, I s'pose," said Joe, laughing; "well, every lad to his liking! but you don't know what you lose, does he, Jim?"

"That he just doesn't," said Jim, who seemed to have but one style of answer ready at hand.

By this time they had reached the turning at which they generally parted, since Joe, for some reason of his own never cared to pass Widow Layton's cottage, and Charley, anxious to shake off his new acquaintance, was not at all sorry to wish them good night; but though he stepped briskly on as he left them, he was not quick enough to avoid hearing Larkin say to his companion, "what's he one of them sneaking fellows as is kept tied to his Granny's apron string?"

Now poor Charley had a weakness too common with boys of his age; he was not proof against ridicule, and those few coarse words, spoken by a worthless, half-witted lad, clouded in a moment his

usually bright face, and sent gloom and discontent into his heart; he entered the cottage in an ill-humour, and passed through it without taking any notice of his grandmother. Mary seeing this, and thinking there must be something more than common the matter, followed him into the small, back kitchen, whither he always went to wash himself before sitting down to supper, but when she spoke to him in her usual kind manner, he turned crossly away and answered her so shortly that the tears started to her eyes, for little Mary had a tender heart and could ill brook unkindness, especially from Charley. The sight of her tears, however, and a glance at his grandmother's pale and anxious face, for she too had noticed his neglect of her, made him feel thoroughly ashamed of himself, and he tried to make up for his momentary ill-humour, by cutting Granny the nicest possible slice of bread and butter, and telling Mary that he had the promise of a pair of wood-pigeons for her; but later in the evening he again became silent and moody as the suspicion crossed his mind that by giving up his time to his grandmother and sister, he was rendering himself a laughing stock to other boys of his age: had he known more of those boys he would perhaps have felt that the lower he stood in their estimation the better.

From this time he and Higgins were often joined in their homeward walk by Larkin, who seemed to be always prowling about that particular spot just at the hour when they were returning; he took but little notice of Charley, addressing all his conversation

—if his coarse, unmeaning, and often profane remarks deserved the name of conversation—to Joe, who pretended to reprove him when he gave utterance to words or sentiments which he knew Charley would not like. Jim received these rebukes with surprise and impatience, asking him, on one occasion, what had come over him all at once to make him so squeamish? but the only answer he received was a smart rap on the shoulder and a command to hold his tongue. It must however be noticed here as a proof how dangerous it is for well disposed boys to associate with those from whom evil is to be learned, that, after a few walks taken in his company, Charley ceased to notice the coarseness of Larkin's manners or the unseemliness of his talk; his eye and ear had become accustomed to them, and we are not sure that Mary's gentle ways and her simple details of the little events that had occurred during his absence, did not sometimes seem tame and insipid by comparison.

It must not, however, be supposed that Charley Layton either sought or liked the company of such a boy as Larkin; on the contrary, he never saw him come without wishing him away, but to endure his presence seemed to be a necessary consequence of his friendship with Higgins, which became more intimate every day, for besides that Charley was still deceived in his character and was a firm believer in the sincerity of his regard for himself, the two boys had some tastes in common.

Young Layton had a great love for dumb creatures, and was never better pleased than when prying into

the mysteries and peculiarities of animal life; now Joe was familiar with the haunts and habits of every kind of living creature that was to be found in the neighbourhood, from the common hedge sparrow and field mouse, to the lordly pheasant that strutted about Squire Grantley's plantations, or the royal heron that was sometimes to be seen flying high above his head in Sir John Ascott's Park, and he had already strengthened his hold on Charley's heart by helping him to a squirrel and a pair of wood-pigeons, both of which had been handed over to Mary's careful guardianship.

The first time Charley Layton was induced to turn his back upon his home after the labour of the farm was over, it was by a promise which Joe had made him in the course of the day to point out the exact spot on the edge of the "Long Pond" at the Grange, where a kingfisher had, last season, taken possession of a water rat's nest, and there hatched its young, some of which might still be seen of an evening skimming about on the surface of the water. Charley had never seen a kingfisher, and Joe had given him such marvellous accounts of the beauty of their plumage that his curiosity was excited, and he felt a very natural desire to gratify it. The distance to the pond from the Farm was but half-a-mile; so that the walk thither might easily have been taken, and Charley yet have reached home in time to help his sister in her preparations for the next day, which happened to be one of the busiest of the whole week at the cottage; but the two boys lingered long beside

the water; and as they were turning away, Joe proposed that they should cross a field, where, he said, he could put up "such a large covey of partridges!" and this led them so near a rabbit warren, that they must needs go round and look at that. It was nine o'clock when Charley reached home, where he found poor little Mary nearly worn out with breaking up wood, pumping pail after pail of water, and doing all that her childish strength could do to forward the next day's wash!

Mrs. Layton was as much put out of the way by this little occurrence as she could be by anything in which Charley was the offender; for she had brought him up in a strict regard for home duties, and setting aside his neglect of her in her present invalid state, it was, she thought, not only inconsiderate, but very selfish of him thus to leave Mary to do work that was so much better suited to his own strong arm. Still it was a favorite saying of her, that boys will be boys, to the end of time, and that her boy was so much better than many other boys she had known, that she was fain to pass by his fault in silence, though her heart felt all the heavier, that she set it down as the effect of Higgins's bad example.

And now the good rule of coming in at a regular hour having been once broken through, excuses were constantly found for breaking through it again: and evening after evening Mary had to watch for her brother's return in vain: often it was quite dark when he came in; and although he generally entered in haste, declaring he had no idea it was so late, he

the mysteries and peculiarities of animal life; now Joe was familiar with the haunts and habits of every kind of living creature that was to be found in the neighbourhood, from the common hedge sparrow and field mouse, to the lordly pheasant that strutted about Squire Grantley's plantations, or the royal heron that was sometimes to be seen flying high above his head in Sir John Ascott's Park, and he had already strengthened his hold on Charley's heart by helping him to a squirrel and a pair of wood-pigeons, both of which had been handed over to Mary's careful guardianship.

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was almost sure to be equally forgetful the following evening.

At first, indeed, he always gave an account of his rambles, and thus far they had not extended beyond the neighbouring fields and woods; but then they were taken in company with Higgins and Larkin, both of them names equally disagreeable to Mary and her grandmother; and it was not very long before a change for the worse shewed itself in Charley's manners and appearance. He began to assume more importance, was rather inclined to domineer over his sister, and now and then he was even wanting in respect to his grandmother. From being always in a hurry to get away, he grew less careful of his personal appearance, and was not only more trifling, but much more free in his conversation, often using words, and sometimes even uttering sentiments, such as had never before been heard in that well-conducted home.

After a time, other names began to be talked of as the companions of his evening walks; but they all belonged to lads of the same stamp, and Charley no longer waited to consider whether Granny would like him to play in the public streets, but was often to be found there, joining in many rough and mischievous sports, for, unfortunately, there was no public playground in the village; and so the good old, healthy, manly games of cricket or football were never practised among them.

All this caused much sorrow to the poor old widow, who, tied down to her chair by rheumatism, could

take no active measure to restrain Charley's movements, even had she felt it wise to do so; she could only appeal to his better feelings, and point out to him how hard it was that so young a girl as Mary should have to work beyond her strength, while he was indulging his own idle fancies. In justice to the boy, we must acknowledge that these appeals were seldom without their effect upon him; and for several nights he would be found at his post, until some fresh temptation was held out, when he would again yield to it, and slip away, leaving his sister not only to do his work, but to mourn over the loss of their once happy evenings. Still the affectionate little girl—seeing how much her grandmother took Charley's absence to heart, and that she was beginning to grow almost irritable under a sense of his neglect—tried to make the best of it, for Mary had been growing wiser as well as older during the last few months. It was not in vain that she had witnessed her grandmother's patience under severe suffering, and the self-denial she constantly exercised for her sake and her brother's; they led her to ask herself if there was anything she could do to lessen the trial, and thus it happened, that instead of fretting, as she would once have done over the loss of Charley's companionship, she often found excuses for him, even where his indulgent grandmother could find none.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RIGHT USE OF SCHOOL LESSONS.

"O DEAR! O dear! it is so very heavy! if Charley would but come and help me up this high hill, how glad I should be!" and the little girl who thought these words, for there was no one near to whom she could speak them, put down the half-filled pail of water she was carrying, and stopped to take breath. She was a little, undersized thing, apparently about nine years old, though at first sight she might have been taken for a year or two older, for her face was pale, and had a look of care and thoughtfulness beyond her age. A casual observer would have called her plain; but those who knew her well, and had constant opportunities of noticing the ever-varying expression of her bright hazel eye, and the delicate bloom which every change of feeling called up into her pale cheek, were accustomed to think her very pretty; neither opinion was quite correct; she was a delicate, nice-looking little girl, and nothing more.

"Well, never mind! we'll 'Try, try, try again,'" she continued to think. "Often and often I've sung that at school, and now the time is come for me to practise it, for the pump is broken, and if I don't get

this water safe home, poor Granny will have no tea to-night"; and putting forth all her strength, little Mary Layton, for she it was, contrived half to lift, and half to drag the pail up the steep bank, which her childish imagination had magnified into a hill, and in a few minutes more she had lifted the latch of Widow Layton's door, and placed her burden within it:

"There it is, Granny, safe and sound, and I've carried it every step of the way myself; is not that grand?"

"Bless you, my darling, for a useful little body as you are," said the old woman, turning herself round, though not without difficulty, that she might have a fuller view of Mary. "But, deary me," she continued, "that weight's too much for you to lift, child, such a weakly thing as you are; where's Charley? why couldn't he fetch it instead of you?"

"O, but I'm getting quite a woman now; I'm almost nine, you know, Granny," said Mary, evading the question.

"I only wish you were nineteen, darling, and then you'd be able to help yourself as well as others with your kind heart and ready hand."

Luckily for Mary's character as a humble little maiden, she was too busily occupied in filling the tea-kettle to heed these flattering words; and very soon the said kettle was boiling, the tea-things were placed, and Mary's eyes were beaming with contentment as she saw her invalid grandmother enjoying the meal in which she so much delighted.

"But where is Charley? Why does he not come in to tea?" asked Mrs. Layton, presently. "I heard him outside more than half-an-hour ago."

Mary bent her face low, as if to examine the bread she was toasting, for she did not wish to meet her grandmother's eye, as she replied, "I don't know, Granny; I suppose he's—he's about somewhere."

Now Mary knew very well where her brother was, for she had seen him some twenty minutes before walking with Higgins and another boy towards the village; but for reasons of her own, and kind reasons too, she did not wish her grandmother to know it; yet, she felt she was not telling the exact truth, and a sense of shame made her try to hide her face.

"There, now! is not that a lovely brown, and as crisp as anything?" she continued, wishing to break what she felt to be an awkward silence. "O, how I wish we had the least little bit of butter to put on it, don't you, dear Granny?"

"Better as it is, dear, much better as it is," said the old lady. "Friday will soon be here, and then we shall have butter to our bread again; I'd much rather do without it than go in debt for it, Mary."

"Yes! we shall have Charley's wages coming in on Friday," said Mary, proudly; "how much they help us, do they not? Granny, don't you wish I was old enough to earn something too?"

"You do earn something, Mary, and a great deal sometimes; why, I should be obliged to keep a little maid to wait on me, if it were not for your handy

ways; and don't you fold the linen almost as well as I do, and iron very prettily for your age?

Praise like this from her grandmother's lips made the little girl feel very happy, and she inwardly resolved that she would try more and more to deserve it. She was a thoughtful child, and often felt grieved that Granny should have to work so hard, and she looked forward with some impatience to the time when she might be able to relieve her from, at least, a portion of her labours; but it had never occurred to her before, that she was already bearing her part of the family burden.

"I wonder what can have become of Charley," said Mrs. Layton, again, as Mary poured out her third cup of tea. "How sadly negligent the boy is growing; there are the clothes lines to be taken in, and he promised to weed that bed of radishes to-night; I only wish I could do them myself. It is a hard thing to be obliged to sit still and only talk of work, when there's so much wants doing."

"But it is not seven o'clock yet," said Mary, in a soothing tone, for her grandmother had spoken more impatiently than usual. "He'll have plenty of time to do it all when he comes home. I'll run and look if I can see him coming"; and she was hastening towards the door for that purpose, when it was thrust suddenly open and Charley entered.

"Please, Granny, where's my purse? I want it directly!" he exclaimed, rushing past Mary, and seeming to forget that he had not spoken to either of them since he went out to work in the morning.

"Your purse, child! why, where should it be, but where you put it yourself, in the best tea caddy! What do you want with it just now; arn't you going to have some tea?"

"No, not to-night, thank you! I don't want any. I only want my money! I'm going to the fair!"

"To the fair! what fair?" and his grandmother almost starting from her seat, in spite of the rheumatism, while Mary stood by looking little less astonished.

"Why, Downham Fair! Didn't you know this was Downham Fair day? Everybody is gone, or else going."

"No! not everybody! Mary and I are not going," said the old woman, rather sharply.

"Poor dear Granny! no, you could not manage to walk so far, could you?" said Charley, with a sudden change of countenance, as he remembered, for the first time that evening, her crippled state.

"If I could walk ever so well, I should not spend my strength in going to fairs," said Mrs. Layton. Do you know what sort of a place a fair is, Charley?"

"No! that I don't; I should just like to know; they say there's lots of shows and mountebanks, and all sorts of funny sights!"

"I'll tell you what it is then," said the widow. "A fair is a place where Satan spreads his nets to catch silly boys and girls, aye, and silly men and women too, that he may steal money out of their pockets, and grace out of their hearts."

"O Granny! I've heard quite different from that,"

said Charley, beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, and, to hide it, playing with the lock of the tea caddy. "At any rate I should like to see a fair, so do let me go this once; I'll promise you it shall be the very last time."

"Charles!" said his grandmother, looking at him with a mournful expression, such as he had never noticed on her face before, "Listen to me. I once knew a man, a young man too, who went into a scene of temptation and wickedness with those very same words on his tongue, and they proved to be true words; he went, but it was indeed the last time, for he was brought home—dead." Here Widow Layton broke down, and burst into tears!

Charley trembled and turned pale. He had never heard the history of his father's death; for the loving mother had carefully guarded her son's memory from being coupled with shame in the hearts of his children; but he had a dim recollection of some scene of horror connected with his own early childhood, and a suspicion flashed upon him that his grandmother's words were in some way connected with it; besides, he never could bear the sight of her tears; so he threw his arms round her neck, and gently drew her towards him as he said, soothingly, "Granny! dear Granny! don't cry, and I'll give it up. I won't go to the fair if you'd rather I wouldn't, only——"

"That's my own good dutiful boy!" interrupted the widow, raising her head, and regarding him with a look of affection. "It's for your own good, Charley, that I wish to keep you away. I've seen many go

to such places, but I never yet saw one return either the better or the richer for going; for the most part, on the contrary, they've brought back aching heads and empty purses."

"I've made up my mind then! I won't go!" said Charley, in a decided tone.

"And to-morrow you will be all the happier for having staid away! but Charley, my own dear boy," continued his grandmother, speaking in a still more earnest tone, as she drew him closer to her side, "I want you to make me another promise!"

"Another, Granny! what is it?" he asked, looking at her enquiringly.

"That you will never sit down to drink in a public house!"

As this was a form of temptation to which Charley had not yet been exposed, he answered, in some surprise, "A public-house! Granny! is it likely I should? Why, I was never at a public-house in my life!"

"I should hope not!" said his grandmother; "but the time of temptation has not yet come to you! it will come, Charley, sooner or later, depend on that; and it may come when there is no friend at hand to warn you of your danger; but if you once give me your promise you will keep it, though I may no longer be here to remind you of it."

"I will promise, and I hope I shall keep my promise, too!" said Charley. "Only, dear Granny, you must not talk of leaving us; what could Mary and I do without you?" and for the second time

within the last half-hour, the sight of her pale face and crippled form sent a pang through the young boy's heart, and brought tears into his eyes.

Widow Layton felt that she had touched a tender chord, and that she must now act the part of comforter.

"You know, my darling boy," said she, "I shall be taken from you none the sooner for having set my house in order; and the Lord's time, come when it may, is sure to be the right time for us all; so now we will put away all gloomy thoughts, and strive so to live that we may neither of us be afraid to die."

It was some little time before Charley remembered that he had promised to meet Higgins to walk with him to the fair, and when he did remember it he felt a little puzzled to find an excuse for breaking his engagement; he had not the courage to go boldly forth and tell Joe that his grandmother disapproved of fairs, and that he had given it up in obedience to her wishes. He knew he could not stand the laugh which such an avowal would be sure to draw forth from one who had never studied anybody's will but his own; and so he sat playing with the clasp of his purse, as he vainly tried to frame some plausible reason for having changed his mind; but presently, uttering an exclamation of surprise, he turned his purse inside out, and cried,

"Why! Granny—Mary—how's this? my shilling is not here; look! the purse is empty! Ah! you've been playing me a trick, I see you have, you mischeivous thing," he continued, rising and approaching

his sister, who stood looking on in a state of bewilderment.

"Your shilling not there! What do you mean, Charles?" asked his grandmother. "Why, you locked the purse into the caddy yourself; let me see, when was it you had it out last?"

"O! I remember," said Mary, hastily, "it was that Sunday afternoon when you were going to buy Joe Higgins's knife."

How true is it, that those who enter on the crooked paths of deceit, are in constant danger of being found out. Here was the secret that Charley had been so anxious to conceal betrayed in a moment. Poor Mary stammered and looked confused, for she saw, when too late, the mischief she had done; but though Widow Layton heard the words, and at once took in their meaning, she would not seem to hear them. Her heart sank indeed, as she thought of the dangers that beset her children on every side, and remembered how different it might have been if their father had lived, and so lived as to have been able to perform towards them the part of a Godly parent; but after the scene they had just passed through, she felt it was not the moment again to reprove Charley, and so she prudently allowed Mary's words to pass unnoticed. "Do you think you dropped your money anywhere?" she asked.

"No! I'm pretty sure I put it back in the purse; for I remember clasping it quite carefully afterwards."

"But could we not go and look about in that

field?" asked Mary. "You might have let it fall on one side, you know; and if so, perhaps it's there now, for I daresay people don't often go up into that corner."

As the shilling had certainly disappeared, Charley could think of no better plan for trying to recover it, than that which his sister proposed, and they left the cottage together to look for it. A little way down the road they met Joe Higgins, accompanied, much to Charley's vexation, by Jim Larkin.

"I can't go with you to the fair, Joe," said he, in a resolute tone; "I've lost my shilling, and must go and look for it."

"What! have you got only one, then?" asked Larkin, sneeringly. "Why, what a poor fellow you must be!" but Joe, without making any answer, began to look very intently at something in the hedge.

"Yes, Joe Higgins," said Mary, "Charley has lost his shilling, his beautiful bright shilling; don't you remember it?"

It was the first time she had spoken to him in her life, except on that Sunday afternoon when she had called him a bad boy; and now, as he heard her pronounce his name in that soft clear voice, he turned suddenly round, and for a moment his eye met hers; but it was the same searching look, beneath which he had quailed years before, and again his eye fell, and he turned quickly away; there must have been something in that hedge that no one could see but himself, for he thrust his arm far into it, and then tried to poke his head in after it.

"You did not see Charley drop his shilling, did you?" asked Mary.

"How should I see him drop it?" replied Joe, his face still hid among the leaves. "He didn't drop it at all, not he; he put it back in his purse."

"I only thought you might have seen it," said Mary, meekly; and then telling her brother that he would find her at Dame Tomkins's cottage, she took her way down the lane. Joe seemed much relieved by her absence, and he now turned to where Charley was parrying the attacks of Larkin, who had continued to jeer him about the slender contents of his purse.

"Well, I'd never rest satisfied with a paltry shilling, if I was you, I'd get more than that, see if I wouldn't," said the great illmannered boy.

"But how can I get more?" asked Charley.

"Why, you should hoard up, to be sure!" said Jim, slapping his own pocket, and producing a jingling sound, that seemed to tell of shillings and sixpences being hoarded there.

"How can a fellow hoard up what he hasn't got?" said Charles, impatiently.

"Doesn't your grandmother give you no money?" asked Jim, pretending to be much interested in the case.

"No! how can she? she has enough to do to find me in food and clothes!"

"O! so you earn it, and the old woman spends it; well, I'd never stand that, not I! I'd spend what I earnt, or else I'd hoard it up, see if I wouldn't!" and

withdrawing his hand from his pocket, he spun a half-crown piece in the air and caught it in his mouth.

"Wherever do you get so much money?" asked Charley, surprise and curiosity getting the better for a moment of the indignation he felt at hearing his grandmother so lightly spoken of.

"So much you call it, do ye! then what think you of this?" and drawing nearer to Charley he shewed him, in his half-closed hand, a number of pieces of silver of various sorts and sizes! "Shouldn't you like some of them, my boy? Eh?"

"Yes! If I'd come honestly by them!" said Charley. At hearing which remark, Jim hastily returned his treasure to his pocket.

"But did you earn all that?" asked Charley, beginning to think whether he might not profit by Jim's example.

"I tell you I hoard up!"

"And I tell you I've nothing to hoard."

"Well, then, you see the case is just this," said Jim, looking very wise. "You want money, and you haven't got none; now, a fellow as hasn't got any can't hoard it, so I'll tell you what you must do!"

"What?" cried Charley, a little too eagerly, for he was already beginning to build airy castles for his grandmother and Mary to live in all the rest of their days.

"Why, you must keep your eyes open," said Jim; "you must keep your eyes open when you're down yonder!" and as he spoke he pointed over his shoulder in the direction of the Farm.

Charley felt his face turn crimson; for the first time he understood that he had been listening to the voice of a tempter, and he was turning angrily away when Joe interfered.

"Don't mind what that foolish fellow says, Charley, he's only chaffing you! Jim hasn't sense enough to keep his eyes open—nor his mouth shut either," he mumbled to himself; "but I'm sorry you won't come to the fair, Layton," he continued aloud. "There's lots of ways of turning an honest penny there!"

"I thought people went to fairs to spend money, and not to gain it," replied the other.

"Aye, so they do, if they like; but one may make a deal of money at a fair, if one does but go the right way to work."

"Well, I'm not going now, and that's settled," said Charley, "and so good-night to ye"; and without farther speech he set off to rejoin his sister; but I dare not say that the glitter of Jim's half-crowns did not go with him, and follow him even to his pillow; for how many comforts, he thought, could he not procure for his grandmother, were he possessed of only half the sum of which Larkin seemed to think so lightly; and the wish would arise, that he too could hoard up for her sake. And yet, had his grandmother known that such were his thoughts, she would have been the very first to have reminded him that "He who maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent."

The search for the lost shilling was unsuccessful,

and the two young Laytons returned home, consoling themselves by reflecting, that if Charley had found it in his purse, as he expected to do, and taken it with him to the fair, he would have spent it, and so have been no better off than he was now; and this view of the matter was strengthened by a little incident that occurred the next day. A poor wretched-looking beggar woman, with two children, came into the Farm yard, where Jim Larkin had, as was his frequent custom now, joined him and Joe as they were at work together. Earnestly she pleaded with them in behalf of her starving children; but with the exception of Charley himself, who gave her a large slice off his own loaf of bread, neither of them had anything to bestow upon her; as for Larkin, he declared with an unblushing face, that he hadn't a single penny if she'd give him a "sovercin" for it.

But, strange to say, they had not seen the last of the bright shilling yet! A few days later, as little Mary was tripping lightly along the road that skirted the Manor Farm, with a basket of linen under her arm, something suddenly fell at her feet, causing her to start back half frightened; she looked round to see who it was that had thrown, as she supposed, a small stone at her; but she could see no one, though as there was a thick hedge on one side of the road, she knew that the offender, whoever it might be, was probably hidden behind it; anxious, therefore, to get beyond his reach, she was about to quicken her pace, when she observed something wrapped carefully up in a piece of dirty paper, and on taking it up and

opening it, she found, to her unspeakable surprise, that it was the lost shilling, the identical bright shilling, with the scratch across the Queen's nose, which the loyal little maiden had so often vainly tried to remove. For a moment Mary stood and gazed at it as if spell bound, and then turning round she set off as fast as she could run towards home. Charley had arrived there a few minutes before, and great was the surprise and joy of all at the sight of their recovered treasure. Its owner was determined that he would not again expose himself to the risk of losing it, but that he would buy with it, that very evening, a quarter-of-a-pound of the best tea he could get, for dear Granny's especial drinking. A great deal of wonder was felt and expressed as to where the shilling had come from, and Charley laughingly wished that it were able to give a history of its travels. As for Mary, she looked rather grave; but if she had any suspicions on the subject, she was good-natured enough to keep them to herself.

CHAPTER VII.

CHARLEY'S TROUBLES.

For three or four weeks after Downham Fair day, Charley Layton saw but little of Higgins, and still less of Larkin. In spite of Joe's assurance to the contrary, he could not get rid of the idea that Jim's object had been to tempt him to rob; and as his grandmother's solemn words, which he had just before been listening to, had taught him to distrust himself, he thought it best to keep out of harm's way, by having nothing more to say to so dangerous a character. But while he was thus prudent in avoiding bad company, he was not equally careful to guard against bad thoughts. He forgot, perhaps, that the same wise man who has warned us that "The companion of fools shall be destroyed," has also said that "The thought of foolishness is sin."

And indeed Charley had a good deal to trouble him just at this time, and as it was not a very wise head that was mounted on those young shoulders of his, we must not be much surprised if he sometimes looked at his troubles in a wrong light.

Widow Layton had now fallen into such bad health, that it had become necessary to call in a

doctor, and this expense, added to that of a constant helper in the laundry-work, drew so largely on their small earnings, that the hard gripe of poverty was beginning to make itself felt in their little home. When these every-day claims had been provided for, scarcely enough remained for the purchase of the barest necessaries of life; and although the widow was so much respected that there were few of the village tradesmen but would have trusted her, the children had been brought up with such a horror of running in debt, that the thought of doing so never seemed to occur to them. Poor Mary had now to take the management of the family funds into her own hands, and she did her best to eke them out, so as to make them go as far as possible; but with all her care, they had often to dine off dry bread and potatoes, and the butter she had once felt it hard to do without for a single meal, was a luxury now never enjoyed. The Spring too, had come and gone without bringing the usual supply of new clothes, to take the place of those which the young people so rapidly outgrew; and in spite of Mary's patching and contriving, frocks and jackets were fast going to decay. But it was not their own scanty fare or shabby clothing that troubled the brother and sister, half so much as the fear that their grandmother required a more nourishing diet than they were able to procure for her; not that she ever complained, for she was one who seldom thought of her own wants; but Mary's watchful eye noticed that her delicate appetite often shrunk from the plain food to which they were now reduced. The

doctor too, at every visit, talked of wine and beer, of beef tea and light puddings, and the impossibility of obtaining even the least expensive of these, often caused the heart of the affectionate little nurse to ache. For some time Charley was not so much alive to his grandmother's privations as his sister was; constantly occupied in the open air, his strong and healthy appetite enabled him to eat his dry bread with enjoyment, and when Mary by some effort of good management contrived to add to it a tiny slice of cheese, there seemed nothing left for him to desire; he was too inexperienced in illness to know, that what seemed luxury to him, was little less than starvation to a delicate invalid. A very trifling circumstance, however, opened his eyes to the real state of the case.

Mrs. Layton was sitting up for the first time for several weeks, when Mary, who had toasted a thin slice of bread, and was breaking it into a cup of tea, expressed a wish that they had a new laid egg, as she was sure Granny would be able to eat one, to which the old woman replied that she really thought she should, but that eggs, at their present high price, were dainties quite out of her reach. Charley, who was busy at another part of the room, looked up on hearing these words, and his eye rested on her pale and wasted cheek, looking all the more wasted now that she was occupying her usual seat; and his heart smote him for having thought so little of her wants as an invalid. Before he slept that night, he had taken upon himself to purchase a couple of eggs, and had had the pleasure of seeing his grandmother

thoroughly enjoy one of them; but he had also found that they were indeed too costly to be indulged in often. To him this seemed very hard; and it was while fretting over it, as he lay awake long after his usual time, that his thoughts travelled back to Jim Larkins's hoarded silver, and then he began to wonder why it was that one should be rich and another poor, and especially why their neighbour, Squire Grantley, and his own master, Mr. Bradford, should have houses and lands, and live at their ease, while he, and worse still, his poor old grandmother, had to work hard for their daily bread.

Charley was too young and too inexperienced to know that there is a great deal of head-work, as well as of hand-work, going on in the world, and that those among the rich who, like the gentlemen he was thinking of, feel responsible to God for the use they make of their riches, often work very hard with the head, that they may be better able to help those whom Providence has appointed to work with the hand. And so lying there in his comfortable bed, under cover of the roof that had sheltered him from childhood, he grew angry and envious of those whom he thought better off than himself, and began in his heart to covet his neighbours' goods! And all the while his grandmother in the next room was passing her sleepless night in praying that God would draw the hearts of her children from the things of this world, and fix them on Himself.

It was in such a state of mind as we have described, that Charley went the next day into the fields to

work. He was alone, and the hours seemed to pass very heavily; they always do so when the mind is a prey to discontent; he sat down on a bank to eat his scanty meal, but in the bitterness of his feelings forgot to ask a blessing upon it, though it was a duty he had been taught never to neglect. For the first time his bread seemed dry and tasteless, and he looked with contempt on a very small slice of bacon, which poor Mary had carefully treasured up for him since the previous Sunday; great would have been her disappointment, could she have read her brother's thoughts as he unfolded the paper in which the careful little housewife had wrapped it; for instead of feeling pleasure, as she had intended he should do, he brushed a tear from his eye at the thought that his grandmother, aged and sick as she was, had no better fare than this. The feeling was a natural one, and would have been praiseworthy, had it not come from a proud and rebellious heart.

A public road ran beside the field in which Charley was at work, separating it from the farm yard; and when a few hours later he had finished his day's labour, and was sauntering idly about, scarcely caring to return so soon to his poverty-stricken home, his attention was attracted by a carriage which was passing, containing two ladies, one of whom held in her hand a basket of beautiful peaches; the sight of this tempting fruit did but add to Charley's discontent. There now, thought he to himself, wouldn't she like one of those beauties, and wouldn't it do her a world of good too; I just wish I could take her

one! but what's the use of wishing? such things are only meant for the rich; poor folks, if the're ever so ill, must be content with dry bread. And then, having given vent to his ill humour by cutting off the heads of several wild flowers with a switch he had picked up, he was turning homewards, when his eye was attracted by something white in the hedge, and on stooping down to see what it was, he discovered a nest of hen's eggs; at the first sight of it he started back in almost frightened surprise!

"A hen's nest out here! so far away from the farm yard!" he thought. "Whose can it be, I wonder? One, two, three, four! why here are ten of them, and this one quite fresh laid!" he continued. As he took it up in his hand to examine it more closely: "I wonder whether—to be sure it must, other birds' nests in the fields belong to those who find them, and why shouldn't a hen's nest? a hen is a bird just as much as a sparrow is! besides, how should I know who this particular nest belongs to if it isn't mine, and it would be a pity for such beautiful eggs to lie here and spoil, so I'd better take them home at once; there's nobody here to see me, and Granny will be able to have eggs and puddings too for ever so long. How lucky it was, to be sure, that I happened to spy them out!" and having thus put his conscience to sleep, Charley was proceeding to lay hold of the eggs, two at a time, to transfer them to his dinner bag, when suddenly there seemed to arise upon his ear the sound of his grandmother's voice, distinctly repeating the words, "Thou shalt

not steal," just as he had heard her repeat them scores of times, when, as a little child, she was teaching him the ten commandments. Hastily, as if stung by an adder, he drew back his hand and jumped up. "Steal!" he exclaimed, and this time he spoke aloud. "Would it be really stealing? and was I, Charley Layton, going to turn thief?" and then conscience answered the question for him: "Yes, Charley, try to hide it as you might, that would have been the name you would have earned for yourself!" "But, thank God, I'm not a thief yet!" he thought; and then remembering that the surest way to resist temptation is to fly from it, he turned and fairly took to running, and never looked behind him until he had reached the Farm. Arrived there, the first thing he did was to go and tell the dairy-woman of the discovery he had made. He had no doubt to whom the eggs belonged now!

Charley went home that night with a lighter heart than he had felt for some time before; and when he knelt beside his bed, there went up words of thankfulness to heaven, such as angels themselves might have rejoiced to hear.

He met his master the next morning with a clear and open brow, which he certainly would not have done, had he yielded to the temptation that assailed him; for let none suppose that the crime he had escaped was a trifling one because that which he was about to steal was comparatively of small value, the sin would have been the same in the sight of God, as if it had been of ten times the worth; in that dread

Book of Account, in which all our actions are written down, we may be sure there is no page set apart for "little sins."

"How's your grandmother getting on, Charles?" said Mrs. Bradford to him that same evening, as she met him on his way to the bailiff's cottage, whither he was going to receive his weekly wages.

"She's a little better, thank you, ma'am," he replied, touching his cap, "only so weak; but the doctor says she'll get on well now the wind is changed!"

"I hope she will, I'm sure," returned his mistress, "for she's one of those worthy, respectable women, whom we can ill afford to lose out of the parish. When Jones has done with you go round to the kitchen, and I'll order cook to put up a bottle of wine and a few eggs for her; no doubt she requires a deal of nourishment after such a long and sharp attack. I ought to have thought of it before, for I know she's one of those who never asks for anything."

Charley turned very red, and though he tried to speak his thanks, no word would come. But Mrs. Bradford was satisfied; she saw the inward struggle, and remarked to her husband that evening, as she had often done before, that there was no lad in the place whom she would sooner trust than Charley Layton. But it was not gratitude and joy alone that had stopped his utterance, although his mistress thought it was; he felt them both, but with them a mingling of shame. He remembered how discontented he had been the day before, how envious of all

above him; he thought of the peaches he had so coveted, and of the foolish words he had spoken about them, and his heart was humbled. As he took the basket from the servant's hand he turned quickly away, to hide the tear that would start, for he knew very well, that while Mrs. Bradford was the giver, it was his Heavenly Father who had directed the gift, and he felt, as he had never felt before, how faithful was that God, in whom his grandmother had trusted through all their trials, and one of whose many promises she had reminded him of but a few days before, "The needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever."

Arrived at home, Charley placed the basket on the table before his grandmother, and we may as well notice here that many good things were found in it besides those Mrs. Bradford had mentioned, for she was a very kind and charitable woman, and had, as we have gathered from her own words, a high esteem for Widow Layton, and a certain liking for her grandson; she had, therefore, ordered jelly and arrowroot to be added to the wine and eggs; and on these unwonted luxuries, carefully treasured up by her little nurse, the invalid's weak appetite was sustained for many days to come. But in this we are anticipating.

Charley, as we have said, placed the basket on the table. "Granny," said he, "I want to tell you something; but I must hide my face in your lap, just as I used to do when I was a very little boy."

His grandmother, who was still very weak, and

only able to sit up a few hours at a time, was at first a little alarmed by his manner; but she folded her hands on his head, as he knelt before her, and listened with trembling interest while he related to her the adventure of the day before; how he had been tempted, and how he had resisted the temptation when he thought of the words she herself had taught him, while yet almost an infant at her knee. "And, dear Granny," he concluded, "I was so sorry, and felt so much ashamed of the wicked thoughts that came into my heart; but I asked God to forgive me for them, and I think He has, because now you see He has given me the very things I most longed for."

His grandmother was deeply affected as she listened to this confession. She felt that it was his love for her that had so nearly led him into sin, and her heart yearned to press him to her bosom, and thank him for his tender care of her; but she was too wise and too holy a woman to let her feelings get the better of her judgment, in a case where the future happiness of one so dear to her might be at stake.

"Charley, my boy," said she, "you forgot that we are never permitted to do evil that good may come; and so, to give me a momentary gratification, you were on the point of sacrificing that, which, as I have often told you, is better than great riches—your good name."

"I know it! I see it all plainly now," said Charley. "But it did seem so hard that you, ill as you are, should have nothing to eat but bread!"

"And yet how much harder it would have been to me to have seen my boy, my hitherto honest boy, branded as a thief! that would have broken my heart outright! O never forget, my Charley," she continued, after a short pause, during which her heart rejoiced that, on one point at least, she could hold up the father as an example to the son, "never forget that you are an honest man's child! and that whatever betide me, I would rather suffer the bitterest pang that poverty could bring to me, than that you should, for my sake, wrong a fellow creature, even to the value of a farthing. Poverty, my dear ones, is no disgrace, but sooner or later 'a thief shall be brought to shame!'"

"Granny!" said Charley, "I feel now, that if I had robbed my master, I should never have been happy again; and yet at the time it did not seem to me as if there was any sin in it."

"That is because our hearts are naturally so deceitful, Charley, that they make the good seem evil to us, and the evil good."

Charley felt that his grandmother was right, and that however wise it might be to guard against evil example from without, there was an enemy in his own bosom that needed to be more watched against still.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD BETTY TOMKINS.

Dame Tomkins, as she was every where called, had been a favorite servant at the Grange during the childhood of its present owner, Squire Grantley; and now that her days of service were over, she lived in a small cottage that formed a sort of Lodge to the back entrance of the Park. Widow Layton was her nearest neighbour, and as the two women were nearly of the same age, a warm friendship had sprung up between them. For some years an evening scarcely ever passed without their spending an hour together in that cosy chat, which old women are sometimes accused of liking too well; but the time for that had gone by now. Widow Layton was quite laid aside, and it was but very seldom that the tottering limbs of her old friend could drag themselves across the meadow that separated the two cottages from each other. This would have been a sad privation to Dame Tomkins, whose only fellow inmate was one of the under gardeners, had not the active little Mary contrived to run in two or three times a-day to speak a cheery word, or to carry a kind message from her grandmother, upon which occasions she would often

stop to sweep the room, or to wash up the plates and cups; indeed, there was nothing pleased the little girl better than to feel herself of use to their lonely neighbour.

Dame Tomkins was no scholar; there were no Sunday Schools when she was young, and but very few Day Schools for the poor; and as her parents could scarcely earn enough money to feed their large family, she had never been sent to one. This, she used to say, did not trouble her much at the time, but she was very sorry for it now; for many a long hour that she was obliged to pass alone, would have seemed much shorter if she could have spent it in reading the Bible or some other good and interesting book. But Dame Tomkins possessed a Bible, although she was not able to read it; she had bought it with the first money she saved when she went to service; her fellow servants had laughed at her for it, and advised her to change it away for a smart cap, which they said would be of some use to her, while the Bible was of no use at all; but Betty, as she was then called, thought differently. She told them she hoped to have a home of her own some day, and she should never think it well furnished without a Bible; besides, she should often get some friend or neighbour to read it to her, and now that time was come; and nobody who saw Dame Tomkins's Bible, could go away and say that it looked as if it were never used; but of the many who had read its sacred pages since the well-remembered day when Betty Tomkins first brought it home, carefully wrapt up in several sheets

of paper, from the Market Town to which she had gone for a holiday, there was no one whom she liked so well to listen to as Mary Layton. Perhaps it was because Mary had been early taught to feel a deep reverence for the holy book, and therefore always read it in a low clear voice, that harmonized so well with its beautiful language.

One evening when Charley had, for a wonder, found some employment that kept him in doors, Mary, leaving their grandmother in his charge, ran across to her old friend to see if she could help her; but Dame Tomkins had been more active than usual that afternoon, so that all was in order before the little maid arrived. "And I'm glad of it, Mary, dear," said the old woman, welcoming her with a loving smile; "there's enough for your young strength to get through at home, without the extra labour of doing for me; but if you've half-an-hour to spare, just sit down and read me a chapter, something that I may 'remember on my bed, and meditate on in the night watches,' as holy David did."

"May I choose the chapter myself, Dame?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"Surely you may! who could choose better, I should like to know?"

Dame Tomkins, it must be observed, was a little too apt to flatter her young friend, and it was, perhaps, fortunate that Mary was so busy looking out one of her favorite chapters, that she did not heed her words. She selected the twenty-fifth of Matthew, which she read through very slowly and reverently, often pausing

to think over some verse, the meaning of which she did not, at first, clearly understand: when she came to that part of it where the Lord is described as separating the righteous from the wicked, her voice faltered, and both she and her listener became so deeply absorbed in this solemn subject, that neither of them noticed that they were no longer alone; a lady and a little girl had quietly entered the room, the door of which stood open to the road, and arrested, either by the words themselves, or by the sweetly plaintive voice of the reader, now stood still at a little distance from the spot where Mary sat with her back towards them.

There, Dame Tomkins, said the child as she finished reading and closed the book, don't you call that a wonderful thing: Jesus Christ putting Himself in the place of poor people and saying to those who are kind to them, "Inasmuch as ye did good unto them ye did it unto me"?

"Aye, sure it is wonderful, Mary, dear, and isn't it still more wonderful that for our sakes He became poor when He might have been rich, and though the whole world was His own, didn't keep a place in it where to lay His head. I can't see what right any Christian has to complain of poverty after that; but deary me, if here isn't my good lady and little Miss Edith, and us never to see them come in; I'm sure I humbly ask your pardon Madam," and the old woman started from her seat and dropped a low curtsey, which caused Mary to look first at her and then to turn round in some confusion, for although she had

never seen them before, she was pretty sure that the visitors were Mrs. Grantley and her daughter Edith.

The present master and mistress of the Grange had but very lately returned from abroad, where they had resided for some years, until the death of Mr. Grantley's father called them home to take possession of their family property; thus it happened that the lady had not yet had time to get acquainted with any of her former neighbours except Betty Tomkins, to whom, as an old servant, she had paid several visits, but she was too kind and benevolent a person to remain long in ignorance of the circumstances and wants of those over whom Providence had appointed her to watch; she had already heard the affecting history of Widow Layton and her orphan grandchildren, and had left home that very evening with the intention of finding them out.

"This, I suspect, is the little maiden I have been in search of, is it not, Betty, that same Mary Layton you told me about?" asked Mrs. Grantley, as she seated herself and drew the child gently towards her. Mary's heart went pit-a-pat, for she had never been spoken to by so grand a lady before; but if the handsome dress and stately manners of the stranger rather awed, the kind smile and sweet voice as quickly reassured her. "I have just been to see your grandmother, Mary, and she told me I should most likely find you here."

"Yes, bless her, she runs across whenever she has a minute to spare," put in Dame Tomkins, who was anxious to recommend her little friend to the favour of

one so able to serve her, "she's not like many young girls, best pleased to help them as can help themselves."

"You did not think that I and my little daughter were listening to you while you read those beautiful words, Mary," said the lady; "I am glad to hear you can read so well.

"Please Ma'am it was Charley that taught me to read," replied Mary, ever more ready to sound her brother's praises than to hear her own.

"And who is Charley, pray?" asked Mrs. Grantley.

"He is my brother, Ma'am, he used to teach me when he went to school, and Granny says I learnt better of him than of anybody."

Mary had already grown quite communicative under the warmth of Mrs. Grantley's smile.

My child and I have been wishing to become acquainted with you for some time past, have we not Edith? asked the lady, turning to her daughter, but Miss Edith did not seem quite prepared with an answer. Almost ever since she first entered the room her eyes had been resting on Mary with a half bashful, half wondering expression: so long as they had been fixed only on the sweet, modest face of the little villager, her own had beamed with pleasure, but presently they happened to fall on a patched and faded frock, and shoes very much the worse for wear, and then the expression changed, for how, she thought, could there be anything in common between her and a girl so meanly dressed; unfortunately, in her dislike of the patches, she quite forgot to notice how neatly

they were put on; had she done so, and known at the same time, that it was the work of Mary's own hands, she would probably have felt more respect for one who could sew, at least, much better than she could herself.

Mrs. Grantley, however, who partly read her daughter's thoughts, did not wait for an answer to her question, but continued to talk with Mary, and drew from her many particulars about her own and her brother's daily occupations.

"I should like you to come to the Grange, to-morrow morning at ten o'clock," she presently said, as she noticed Mary glancing towards the door as if wishing to get away, "I have some cough mixture that I think will be of service to your grandmother; can I depend on your being punctual, Mary?"

"Please ma'am, if Granny can spare me you may!"

Mrs. Grantley smiled. "You are quite right to make that condition," said she, "you must on no account neglect your best friend; but I believe you will have no difficulty in gaining permission to come, and so I shall expect you."

Mary curtsied her acceptance of the invitation so kindly given, and being really impatient to return to her grandmother, from whom she had of late seldom been so long absent, she took a rather bashful leave of her new friends, and not forgetting to give a smile of farewell to Dame Tomkins, made the best of her way home.

Mrs. Layton and Charley listened with much interest to her account of her interview with the lady of the

Grange, and then the former related how kindly she had inquired about her illness and how many little remedies she had recommended to her. To Mary's great delight no objection was made to her fulfilling her engagement on the following morning, and her head was so full of it that she could scarcely sleep for joy; she was up an hour earlier than usual that none of her work might be neglected, and after breakfast, having carefully put everything in its place, swept up the hearth, drawn her grandmother's chair, with its comfortable cushion, close beside it, and put down the irons ready for the woman who was coming to finish off the week's wash, she dressed herself as neatly as she could, and started in the highest spirits for the Grange.

While Mary was tripping lightly across the Park, Mrs. Grantley and Edith were together in a pretty little morning room, where they had just finished breakfast; the former was reading, and the latter was playing with a beautiful poodle dog that lay at her mother's feet. Suddenly the little girl started up and asked, "How long will she be before she comes, Mamma?"

"It wants a quarter to ten, Edith, so if she is punctual she will be here in fifteen minutes."

"O, I'm so glad: fifteen minutes will soon pass away," said Edith. "But do you know, Mamma," she continued, "I did not like Mary Layton so well as I thought I should; she was so shabbily dressed. Why does she wear such an old frock, I wonder?"

"Probably because her grandmother cannot afford to buy her a new one."

"I wish she could, then; I wish everybody was dressed as well as you and I are. I do not like shabbily-dressed people at all."

"Do you not?" said her mother; "I do, very much sometimes. But I'm reading, Edith, so do not interrupt me just now;" and Edith stooped down again to play with her dog.

"Be so good as to bring me a Bible," Mrs. Grantley presently said.

Edith went to a side table, and chose from among several that were lying on it, one beautifully bound in crimson velvet and gold.

"Not that, love; I prefer my own," said her mother, putting it aside as Edith held it to her.

"Do you really, Mamma?" asked the child, in some surprise.

"Yes, it has a much clearer type and fuller references."

"But this is much handsomer! Yours is so very plain and ugly."

"On the outside I grant it is not so attractive, but it is the inside I wish to look at; and therefore, if you please, I would rather have my own."

Edith reluctantly put aside the gaudily-bound book, and brought the other to her Mamma. She then stood for a minute or two with her eyes fixed, as if in deep thought.

"Mamma!" she presently exclaimed, "I know what you mean by that!"

"By what, my love?"

"By liking the plain Bible better than the smart one!"

"Well, what do I mean, Edith?"

"That we ought not to judge of things by their outside show, nor of people either, I suppose."

"Our Heavenly Father does not so judge, my child; you see here what He says about it in His Word."

Edith bent over the Bible and read these words: "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart."

"Mamma, you are always right!" said Edith, throwing her arms round her mother's neck.

"Not always, dearest; but we cannot go far wrong when we take God's Holy Word for our guide."

"May I give Mary something when she comes?" asked Edith, after a short pause.

"Surely, love, if you wish it! What is it to be?"

"I do not know, I am trying to think! Shall I give her a nosegay?"

"A nosegay will not be of much use to her, Edith, flowers soon fade and die! Should you not rather give her something that would last longer?"

"Yes, but I cannot think of anything! Old Dame Tomkins likes the flowers I take her; she always says it's so kind of me to take them."

"Yes! but Dame Tomkins has a very grateful heart, and I fear that sometimes leads her to give you more credit than you deserve!"

"Why, Mamma?"

"Because the flowers you take her cost you nothing, not even the loss of your own daily nosegay. Now, whatever we give to the poor, we should learn to look upon as given back to Him from whom we receive all that we possess; and we should not, therefore, be satisfied with giving what costs us nothing."

"O dear! what can I give her then?" said Edith, sighing.

"Shall I tell you something I heard lately about this very girl you are thinking of?" asked Mrs. Grantley.

Edith looked up with a face full of interest.

"Some time since she met with two gipsey children, who told her, falsely as it turned out, though she believed them, that they were nearly starving, and so much pity did she feel for them, that for two or three days together she secretly put by half of each of her own meals to take to them; until at last she became quite pale and ill for want of sufficient food!"

"O Mamma!" said Edith, and the tears stood in her eyes.

"That, my darling, was trying to do good, hoping for nothing again, not even the praise of well-doing."

"Mamma! shall I give Mary my box of sweetmeats?"

Mrs. Grantley smiled. If there was one thing in the world that Edith just now prized more than another, it was her box of sweetmeats; for besides

that it was very pretty to look at, and the contents were very tempting to the taste, it had been brought her from over the sea by her dear Papa. "I am glad you feel able to offer her what you value so much," said Mrs. Grantley, kissing her; "but I do not think that even your box of sweetmeats would be quite a suitable present for Mary. Would it not be better to save up your sixpences and buy her a new frock; with nurse's assistance I daresay you could even manage to make it yourself."

Edith, who had smiled brightly at the idea of buying the frock, looked a little blank at the prospect of having to make it, for like many other little girls, both rich and poor, she was not very fond of her needle; but before she had time to offer any objection to her Mamma's proposal, the door opened, and Mary Layton was shewn in.

CHAPTER IX.

MARY'S FIRST VISIT TO THE GRANGE.

When the cottage maiden entered the sitting-room at the Grange she stood still a moment, her eyes dazzled with the strange and beautiful things she saw around her; it seemed as if that rich carpet could never have been made to be walked on, and she hesitated to lift her foot from the mat on which the servant had left her standing; but when she saw Mrs. Grantley and Edith looking so kindly at her, and the former beckoning her to come nearer, she no longer felt timid, but walked up to them and made her curtsey.

"You have kept your time well," said the lady, pointing to the time-piece, "and I am glad of it; when you go out to service you will find the advantage of being punctual."

Mary had never thought about going to service before, but as she passed through the hall she had met two neatly-dressed cheerful-looking maids, and it now occurred to her how very pleasant it must be to live always in such a beautiful house, with such a nice lady as Mrs. Grantley.

Her new friend then enquired kindly after her

grandmother's cough and rheumatism, and was proceeding to give her instructions about the medicine, when Edith, unable to contain herself any longer, broke in with, "Mamma says I may buy you a new frock, Mary, and I am to make it myself, only nurse is to help me." And the little girl, while feeling very grand at being thought capable of such an undertaking, secretly congratulated herself, as she looked at the little figure before her, that the seams would not be very long ones.

Mary's eyes sparkled at the thought of a new frock, but a moment's consideration rather damped her joy, for it reminded her of poor Charley's outgrown and sadly threadbare jacket. There was nothing in a new frock that she could share with her brother.

Mrs. Grantley's quick eye caught in a moment the changed expression; she saw too, that Mary had a look of care beyond her years, and her compassion was more than ever excited.

"I found you reading the Bible to Dame Tomkins yesterday, Mary," said she, "and was glad to see that she had such a kind little friend near at hand; I hope, dear, you are also fond of reading it for your own sake."

"Yes, that I am Ma'am," returned Mary, eagerly. "I like it because there are such beautiful stories in it, and because Granny says it is the best of all books."

"Indeed it is, Mary! But tell me, do you also love that dear Saviour about whom the Bible teaches us?"

"I think I do, Ma'am."

"And are you trying to serve and obey and imitate Him?"

"I hope so; I want to very much, and so does Charley, only ——" and here she paused and looked a little confused, for she suddenly recollected, that what she was going to say might lower her brother in Mrs. Grantley's opinion.

"Only what?" asked Mrs. Grantley, drawing the child towards her, for she saw that the tender little heart needed comforting.

"Only Granny says it is so much harder for boys to be religious than girls, because they have to mix with other boys, and with some who are so wicked, that they try all they can to draw their hearts away from God."

"No doubt it is so," replied the lady; "but then, Mary, is it not comforting to know that our loving Saviour does not forget us, even though we so often forget Him? We are all weak and helpless when left to ourselves, but even the youngest and poorest child, who really desires to love Christ, becomes an object of His tender care; and though He may sometimes permit him to be tempted, He will yet keep him from falling. Do you ever pray for your brother, Mary?"

"O yes! Ma'am, Granny and I do very often; and when he doesn't come in in time for prayers, Granny always asks God to take care of him wherever he is."

"Well, then, you know the promise, 'If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it.'"

These were very comforting words for little Mary to listen to; a weight seemed lifted from her heart, as she saw, for the first time clearly, that her dear brother's security from evil depended less on his own strength to resist temptation, than on his being kept by the power of God. And she resolved that she would pray more fervently than she had ever done before, that the tender loving Saviour would watch over him at all times; nay, why should she not pray for him then? And she did pray; even there, as she stood by that kind lady's side, listening to her words of sympathy, the affectionate young heart sent up its earnest silent petition that the brother of her love might be kept from sin.

Edith meanwhile, less interested than Mary in the subject on which Mrs. Grantley had been speaking, had returned to her gambols with the little dog; but now starting suddenly up to look again at their visitor, she caught her muslin frock in the corner of the fender and tore it; the rent was but a small one, yet the little girl's face turned scarlet, and tears gathered in her eyes.

"O! Mamma, what shall I do? Nurse will be so angry!"

"No, love, I do not think she will; it was an accident, Edith!"

"But, Mamma, I tore it yesterday, and it took her a long time to mend; she says her eyes are getting too old to darn; and now to have it to do again will so vex her."

"If you please, Miss," said Mary, blushing, and

speaking as humbly as if she were asking a favour for herself, "if you had a piece of very fine thread I could darn it nicely for you!"

"You! you could darn it! but you're such a little thing; should you know how?" asked Edith, looking at her with mingled surprise and doubt, for Mary, though two years and-a-half older than the young lady of the Grange, was not so very much taller.

"Yes! Miss Edith, I learned to darn at school a long time ago. I darn up all the slits in my own frocks, and in Granny's gowns too." And as she spoke she drew her thimble from her pocket and placed it on her finger.

"You will find some fine thread in my work-table, Edith," said Mrs. Grantley, much amused; "and perhaps, if you watch Mary very carefully, you may learn how to mend your own frock, and so spare poor nurse's eyes."

But Edith still looked a little doubtful as to the possibility of her being able to learn anything from a girl who had been taught in a Charity School. One thing, however, was certain, Mary was preparing to do for her what she never could have done for herself, and this so increased her respect for the little villager, that she even drew forward her own stool, and would have placed her upon it, but Mary, though bred in a cottage, was not to be outdone in that true politeness which knows how to yield their due share of respect to those whom God has placed in a higher station of life, and she modestly drew back for Edith to seat herself, and then kneeling at her feet began to work.

Mrs. Grantley meanwhile was watching her with deep interest. She had taken a great fancy to Mary, and plans for her future good were already beginning to be formed in her benevolent mind. When the frock was finished Edith ran across to her mother and held it up before her.

"It is very neatly darned, indeed!" said Mrs. Grantley, looking at it with a pleasant smile. "If you can do other kinds of needle-work as handily as you have done this, Mary, you will by and by make a very useful servant. What say you, Edith, shall we engage her to be your little maid?"

"O yes! Mamma, do! pray do! I should like it so very much, should not you, Mary?"

But poor Mary, far from sharing the young lady's pleasure, looked perfectly confounded; her face became first red, and then pale, and she seemed on the point of bursting into tears.

"Please, Ma'am! please, Miss Edith! I could not leave my grandmother; she wouldn't be able to get on at all without me, I'm sure she wouldn't."

"Indeed, Mary, I quite agree with you, I am sure she would not, either," replied her friend, in a tone intended to reassure her; "but you need not be alarmed, my poor child, I have no intention of separating you; on the contrary, I hope to be able to assist you in taking care of your grandmother; so now you may go and walk with Miss Edith in the garden, while I give orders about some things you are to take home with you."

It would be difficult to say which was the more

pleased of the two at this permission; the rich child, or the poor one; Edith, who had so much to shew, or Mary, who had so much to see. In one respect the little lady had the advantage, for it is more blessed to give than to receive; and she, after running back to ask her Mamma's leave, not only gathered a beautiful nosegay for her visitor, but gave her one of her own pots of musk, which she had watered and tended all through the summer, and which sent forth a powerful and lovely perfume, that promised, as Mary said, to make Granny's cottage smell as fragrant as the greenhouse it came out of.

When they returned to the house, there stood a basket ready packed, containing a great many nice things for the invalid; and so laden with her treasures, Mary took a smiling leave of her kind benefactors, and with a thankful heart pursued her homeward way, anxious to tell of all she had seen and heard; and this was her first visit to a house that was afterwards to become for many years a happy home to her.

While Mary had been spending her time so pleasantly at the Grange, Charley had been hard at work in the garden of the Manor Farm. It happened, for the first time for many weeks, that he and Joe Higgins had been set to work together to dig a piece of ground, which, from having been long neglected, had become very hard and troublesome to manage. Joe, who was in a very idle mood, declared that "it was impossible to make anything of it, and that he, for his part, didn't mean to try. He

wasn't going to work himself to death for any master"; and so fixing his spade upright in the ground, he betook himself to walking leisurely about with his hands in his pockets, examining the fruit trees, peering into the shrubs to look for birds' nests, or throwing stones into a pond in which there were gold and silver fish swimming about. When he had been going on thus for some time, Charley good naturedly reminded him that the day was getting on, and that if he did not take care his share of the digging would not be finished by six o'clock!

"And what if it isn't finished?" said Joe; "there'll be the more to do to-morrow, that's all; besides, you're getting on so capitally with yours, that you'll have plenty of time to help me."

"Ah! but I shall not help you, see if I do! I'm not going to encourage laziness in that way, Master Joe, so you'd better set to work with a will, and make up for lost time." And as Joe raised his eyes, and saw how high the sun was getting, he probably thought so too.

"Well, if I must, I must," said he, idly sauntering up to the spot where he had left his spade. "But I say, Charley! just look here! here's a find, never trust me if there isn't; won't I have a feast before I begin!" and as he spoke, he picked up and began to eat a very fine Magnum bonum plum, of which some eight or ten lay scattered about under a tree that stood near them.

"Stop! Joe! don't, there's a good fellow!" cried Charley, eagerly; "remember, they're not your's."

"Aren't they? I wonder whose they are, then, when I found them. I'll tell you whose they will be presently; if I don't make haste and eat them they'll belong to the pigs, for that blind old fellow, Jenks, has just carried off half-a-dozen of them with his barrow of cabbage leaves."

"Well, then, let us shew them to him next time he comes in, and then he'll pick them up and take them in to mistress; besides, master's pigs have a greater right to them than we have, without he gives them to us."

"O! that's your opinion, is it?" said Joe, sneeringly, for he had seen so little of Charley lately, that he had lost some of his former caution; "well, 'tisn't mine, and 'tisn't yours neither; is it Jim?" he asked, throwing two or three of the plums over the hedge, for the figure of Jim Larkin had suddenly started up from some secret hiding-place, where he must have been listening to all that passed.

"I should just think not, indeed," said Jim, dexterously catching a plum in each hand, "but yon cowardly fellow, always sees harm where nobody else does. "I say, Joe, what do you keep on pressing him so for? don't you see, if he leaves them alone, there'll be more for us!"

"Well, that's true enough, and precious good they are too," said Joe.

Charley meanwhile quietly pursued his work, now and then glancing at the two greedy boys, as they devoured plum after plum! The day was very hot, and he had worked hard; he felt tired and thirsty,

and the fruit looked very tempting, particularly one fine large plum which Joe, who longed to get him to take a share of the spoil, had contrived to roll close to his foot; it was the very moment for the evil heart within to suggest the question, whether he was not being over particular, and to remind him that probably the fruit would be wasted if they left it lying there; but happily Charley remembered that he had thought just the same about the eggs, and that his grandmother had warned him, on that occasion, always to shun the "beginnings of sin," and so, fearing if he continued to look upon the fruit he might, like Eve of old, find it too pleasant to the eye to be resisted; he rolled the plum back again to its place, and then manfully turned his back upon it.

"I think, Charley, you're the biggest simpleton I've seen this many a day!" said Joe. "As if now master wouldn't be the first to give you that plum if he was here."

"Likely enough he might," said Charley, "for he's always very good to us!" And the recollection of his master's past kindness strengthened him the more to resist the desire that had for a moment arisen in his heart.

Very different was its effect on his companion, who, having now with Jim's help, finished the plums that had fallen, began to cast his eyes wistfully upward to the tree itself; there hung the fruit, thick and luscious, within reach of his hand. He must have one more—just one; and so watching his opportunity when Charley's back was turned, he slyly

snapped one off and began to eat it; but at that moment footsteps were heard coming down a side path. Away went the half-eaten plum over the hedge, and Joe, catching up his spade, began to dig most industriously, while Jim stooping down, crawled along the hedge-row until he was quite out of sight of the garden, and then he started up and ran away. Joe had scarcely had time to resume his work when Mr. Bradford himself came in sight. He cast a searching look on each of his young workmen. Charley met his eye without flinching, as he touched his cap; Joe, whose face was turned the other way, did not so much as look round.

The following evening Mr. Bradford had a few words to say to each of the boys. He told Joe Higgins that he had no further need of his services; he told Charley Layton, that as he had now worked for him twelve months, and generally given him satisfaction, he should raise his wages a shilling a-week.

And so it came to pass, that while Mary, standing at Mrs. Grantley's side, was offering up her little silent prayer for her brother, he, nearly a mile away in Mr. Bradford's garden, was being kept from doing wrong by the power of Him to whom that prayer was made. "Before ye call, I will answer; while ye are yet speaking, I will hear, saith the Lord."

CHAPTER X.

BRIGHTENING PROSPECTS.

Mrs. Grantley was as good as her word; she did help Mary to take care of her grandmother; and from this time a day seldom passed, without bringing a supply of nourishing food from the larder or the storeroom at the Grange, to tempt the sickly appetite of the invalid. Charley, too, was often the bearer of milk and eggs and other farm-house luxuries, sent by Mrs. Bradford for the same benevolent purpose. Thus bountifully cared for, Widow Layton's health rapidly improved; in a few weeks she was able to resume some of her old active habits, and to assist again in the lighter part of the laundry-work. Their expenses were thus considerably lessened, and as Mr. Grantley, whose wife had told him of the Widow's devotion to her orphan grandchildren, declared his intention of allowing her to live, for the rest of her life, rent free; and as Charley's extra shilling, afterwards increased to two shillings, was made the most of by good management, the cottage finances were for the next two years in a much more flourishing state than they had been for a long time before.

Two years! how quickly they pass away, and yet

how great the changes they sometimes leave behind them! Charley grew taller and stronger! Hard work, whatever effect it might have on others, agreed very well with him. His complexion indeed was browner, and his hands were both rougher and redder than they used to be, but his appearance upon the whole was improved; the gloom and discontent which had for a time taken possession of his heart, had now yielded to better feelings, and his face was once again radiant with health and good humour. In some respects, too, he had grown wiser as well as older; he had found out that, however humble a man's calling in life may be, some amount of knowledge is necessary to fit him for it, and that he who knows most has generally the best chance of success. Now it was Charley's ambition to excel as a farm labourer, and he therefore began about this time to pay more attention than he had ever done before to all that was going on at the Farm, and was especially glad when, as was often the case, he was chosen to wait on Reuben Jones, the bailiff, who was celebrated far and near for his skill in training willing boys to become good farm servants.

Unlike her brother in many things, Mary was unlike him in this, that she grew very slowly, and was so delicate and fragile looking, that any one might have supposed her quite unfit for work of any kind; but this was very far from being the case. Few girls of her age were better able to fulfil the duties of her station than Mary Layton. Her grandmother's cottage, always noted for being one of the

cleanest and best kept in the parish, had lost none of its brightness, although its mistress could no longer use either brush or broom. The neighbours, those same talkative neighbours we have referred to elsewhere, who made a great bustle about cleaning once a-week, and only once, could not understand how it was managed, but call when they would, there seemed never to be any cleaning going on, and yet every thing was in order. Of course they would never condescend to take a lesson out of Mary's book, such a young inexperienced thing as she was; but had they done so, they might have gained some useful hints about doing one thing at a time, and that thoroughly, and about not letting the business of to-day intrude on that of to-morrow. That she was a clever little needlewoman Mrs. Grantley herself could have borne witness, after the scene of the torn frock; and we have Dame Tomkins's authority for saying that she could make a mess of broth, or a basin of gruel, better than many a grown-up person. And all this Mary owed to the kind old grandmother who had taken such pains to teach her. I wonder whether any of my young readers owe as much in that way to their mothers and grandmothers; if they do, I hope they are as grateful for it as Mary was.

But to return to Charley. His diligence and attention to his duty did not fail to win for him the good opinion of his master and mistress, and as he grew older he began to be a favorite with his fellow-servants also; two of them especially, William Forbes and Edward Elliot, not being so very much

older than himself, began to make a companion of him. They were both what is commonly called steady young men, which means that they did not frequent the public-house, except on special occasions, were generally to be seen at Church once on the Sunday, were always neatly dressed, respectful in their behaviour to those above them, and were never known to go in debt; but in all this, they were influenced by no higher motive than that of keeping up a good character in the sight of their fellow-men. As for the fear or love of God, it was not in their thoughts; living only for this world, they never concerned themselves as to what might be coming hereafter, and therefore the Bible, which contains God's message to the poor as well as to the rich, to the workman as well as to his master, was of no value in their eyes. They never read it themselves, and what was still worse, they laughed at those who did read it. And yet all this arose more from want of thought, than from a bad disposition on their parts. When one evening they pretended to make fun of Charley, because on calling for him at the cottage, they found him reading the Bible to his grandmother, they meant no harm, but they did a great deal, for from that time the boy grew ashamed of being thought a Bible reader; and to escape the charge, and at the same time shew them that he was independent of control, he would stay out later than ever, spending his evenings with them in idle conversation or foolish frolics, heedless of the grief, as well as the weariness, he was causing his grandmother, who often now had to sit up for him

long beyond her usual hour. But even this was not the worst. Those who suffer themselves wilfully to neglect one sacred duty, generally end by neglecting many more. Had any one told Charley Layton that he would soon become a Sabbath-breaker, he would have felt quite shocked at the idea; for although he had laid his religion aside during the week, he quite intended to take it up again with his Sunday clothes. But he found this not so easy as he expected; he was still ready indeed to accompany his grandmother and sister to Church in the morning, for long-accustomed habits are not given up all at once; but when the afternoon came there was sure to be some plan on foot for spending it more pleasantly, as he began to think, than at Church, and he would slip away directly dinner was over, not venturing in his secret consciousness of wrong doing, to say where he was going, or how he was about to be employed; and when they met again, he would have been ashamed to have told even Mary of the vain and frivolous conversation in which he had been taking part.

One Sunday Widow Layton, on returning from the afternoon service, found Charley seated by the fire reading a newspaper, one of those low cheap publications, which had just then become so common and so mischievous. Such a thing had never been seen there before, and as the old woman's eye rested upon it, her anger was roused.

"Charles!" said she, "you must put that away; no Sunday newspaper shall ever be seen in this house while I'm its mistress!"

"Why, Granny! what's the harm!" said he, starting up, and coming towards her with the paper in his hand. "Look! here are the drollest pictures you ever saw, and such capital reading, all about——" but he was stopped in his speech mid-way, for his grandmother snatched the paper from his hand and threw it into the fire.

Charley turned very red and felt very angry. "O, Granny! you'd no right to do that! it isn't mine, it belongs to Will Forbes!"

"Then here's a penny to pay for it," said the old woman, taking one from the shelf beside her; "and tell him from me, that he may think himself well off to have his money in his pocket instead of a foolish paper, that will do no good either to his mind or his morals, setting aside the sin of reading such trash on the Lord's Day."

"I wonder why people care about reading such silly things," said simple-minded Mary. "You never used to, Charley."

"Of course not when I was a child," returned her brother, angrily, "but now I'm grown up, I choose to read what others read! it's natural I should."

"Yes, that's true," said his grandmother. "It is natural to us all to do the things that we ought not to do, to choose the evil and forsake the good; but that doesn't make it right. Take care, Charley! for if you make up your mind to follow just where your giddy companions lead you, you'll get deep into the mire of sin before you know what you're about."

The boy hung his head; he felt that his grand-

mother was right, but he was just then too proud and wayward to acknowledge it.

"And the worst of it is, 'twon't be for want of knowing better," resumed Mrs. Layton, after a pause. "Tell me, Charley, 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?'"

She looked so fixedly at him, that he could not but answer her in the very words he had so often repeated to her as a child, "'By taking heed thereto according to Thy word.'"

"But what if he never reads that word?" To this he made no answer; so the old woman gave the solemn reply to her own question in the words of Scripture, "'Whosoever despiseth the word shall be destroyed.'"

Tea being now ready the conversation ended; and when the meal was over, and all cleared away, thoughtful Mary quietly brought the great Bible and placed it on the table before her brother; it was open at the 119th Psalm. Charley took the hint and began to read.

"'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord; Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, that seek Him with the whole heart; They also do no iniquity, they walk in His ways; Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently.'"

As the old lady listened to these words, her face, which had been a little ruffled, became calm again; her eyes closed, her lips moved, and Charley, looking up for a moment from his reading, felt sure that she

was praying for him. As the thought came over him, it brought with it a feeling of peacefulness to which he had long been a stranger.

For some weeks afterwards he again attended regularly at the evening prayer in the cottage; but Charles Layton, though a brave boy in many respects, was, as we have already said, wanting in moral courage. Had he seen a little boy oppressed by a big one, he would have taken that little boy's part, had the other been twice as big and twice as strong as himself. He had been known at the Farm to seize hold of a savage dog, to save a poor little animal from falling a prey to its ferocity, but he could not stand a jeer or laugh off a joke; and so when young William Forbes, in the gaiety of his youthful spirits, once more greeted him as "Methodist Charley," all his good resolutions gave way at once, and he forgot equally his respect to the wishes of his grandmother and his duty to God.

"The fear of man bringeth a snare." We shall see by and by into what troubles it led poor Charley.

CHAPTER XI.

CHARLEY LAYTON AT SIXTEEN.

We now pass on to Charley's sixteenth year, Mary being just three years younger, when, towards the close of a day which had been for her one of hard work, Widow Layton sat down wearied in body, as only very aged people are wearied, and not over easy in mind, for she was thinking of her boy, and somehow her thoughts of him were not altogether pleasant ones. It was not that Charley was wanting in affection to her, for she knew that he loved her with his whole heart; neither could she accuse him of being ungrateful. He regularly brought his weekly earnings, and poured them into her lap, receiving back the few pence she could afford to allow him for pocket-money, as if it were a gift from herself. He was steady and industrious, and as she compared him with many other boys of the same age, she could not but acknowledge that he was deserving of the high place he still held in the favour of his master; and yet, as we have said, the grandmother's heart grew heavy as she thought of him. Had any one asked her why, she might have been puzzled to answer the question; perhaps it was because

her past experience had taught her to trust in no promise for the future, however fair, that was not built on the sure foundation of love to the Lord Jesus Christ, while she feared that Charley had not yet that love dwelling in his heart. Be this as it might, when she heard his quick step approaching the door, and his merry voice as he entered, she half reproached herself for her want of confidence, and she drew him down as he passed her chair, and kissed him, with something more than her usual tenderness.

Charley was in the highest spirits that evening; not so Mary. She noticed her grandmother's look of weariness, and fearing that she might have overtired herself, she rather tried to restrain her brother's mirth. When tea was over, Mrs. Layton asked Charley to add up some little bills which Mary was to receive the next morning. This he did, and was then preparing to go out again, when his grandmother called him back, and asked him to stay indoors and read to her.

"But, Granny, I cannot possibly stay now; I promised Will Forbes a week ago that I would walk with him to Downham to-night to meet his brother; he's coming there to fetch a horse for his master. I must go, indeed I must; but I'll get back as soon as I can."

"It's always the case; you're sure to be going somewhere when I want you," said the old lady, rather crossly.

Charley really felt sorry, but he had not thought it necessary to tell her all; there was some rook-

shooting going on that evening at Downham, at which he and several of his friends had agreed to be present.

"Will not Mary's reading to you do as well just this one night?" he anxiously asked.

"Aye, aye, it's the old story; just for to-night! And so you always put off till to-morrow what ought to be done now; there, go along with you! Mary will read to me; she's always ready, bless her, to comfort and help her poor old Granny."

Charley very seldom heard such fretful words as these from his grandmother's lips, and they sent him out with a much heavier heart than he had brought in. Mary followed him to the door; praises bestowed at her brother's expense had small charm for her! "Never mind, Charley," said she, as she patted him fondly on the shoulder; "Granny's tired, she'll be all right again when you come back, only don't stay out late."

"I wish I hadn't been going to-night, that I do!" And Charley did wish it; and he felt too that he didn't care for the pigeon-shooting, and that he would much rather stay with his grandmother; but he feared being laughed at, and so he went.

During the early part of the walk he was dull and silent; but by the time they reached Downham he had recovered his spirits, and was ready to join in the merry conversation and mischievous frolics of the young men who had assembled there to watch the shooters; but when, after the sport was over, it was proposed that they should adjourn to a public-house

for half-an-hour before Forbes and his brother separated, Charley, who had never forgotten his promise to his grandmother, took an opportunity of stealing away from the rest of the party, and set off to walk home alone. He had not, however, proceeded far, when he heard voices behind him, and on looking back could just discern, by the light of the moon, for it was nearly nine o'clock, the forms of Joe Higgins and his inseparable companion Jim Larkin. He saw too, that they were quickening their steps to overtake him. Charley would gladly have avoided them, for he never willingly associated with Larkin, but he did not wish to offend the other, for whom he still felt both regard and pity, looking upon him as a neglected homeless youth, who often did wrong, because he had never been taught by his parents to do right.

As they came up with him Joe began to rally Charley on his having slipped away so slyly from the rest of his party, and affected to believe that he was up to some "lark," as he called it, which he wished to keep to himself. But Charley innocently disclaimed all thoughts of larking, and said all he wanted was, to get home and to bed in good time.

"That's just what I want," said Jim, "so I shall go this way; will you come along too, Joe?"

"Yes, if Charley will," said Joe.

"O! hang it! don't stop for him," cried Larkin, jumping over a gate that led into one of Squire Grantley's preserves. "He won't come, I know, afore you ask him!"

"You will though, won't you, Charley?" said Joe,

coaxingly; it's full a quarter-of-a-mile nearer, and twice as pretty as the road, especially by moonlight!"

"But people aren't allowed to go there, are they?" said Charley.

"Who's to see us at this time of night? besides, what harm shall we do just walking quietly through. You'll see lots of pheasants there, my boy! for they'll sure to fly out when they hear us! do come! I say, do now!" he called out, for Charley had moved a few steps onwards.

"What a fool you are, Joe, to stand there trying to get him into it," said Jim, who had come back over the gate, and was now approaching Higgins; "he'd only spoil sport if he was to come."

These words, though uttered in a lower tone, and certainly not intended for Charley's ear, were heard by him, and they led him to fear, that one of the two boys at least, was bent on mischief. Anxious, therefore, to save Joe from getting into a scrape, he returned to the spot where they were standing, and earnestly besought him to keep the road, as no good could possibly come from trespassing. Joe however seemed quite inclined to follow Larkin, who had by this time re-entered the plantation and disappeared; and Charley, after a moment's hesitation, turned as if to go in with him, when a footstep was heard coming along the road, and a man belonging to the village appeared in sight, who no sooner recognized Charley than he exclaimed, "What are you doing here, youngster? You ought to be at home I reckon; don't you know your grandmother's took ill?"

"Ill! who? what do you mean?" faltered Charley.

"Why, your grandmother, Widow Layton, to be sure! I saw your sister running for the doctor a'most an hour ago!"

Charley heard no more; but set off at full speed along the road that led to his home. He had no time for thought; he did not attempt to realize what lay before him; his only feeling was one of intense anxiety to be near his grandmother. He reached the cottage; the door stood wide open, the lower room was empty, but there was a sound of footsteps and of smothered voices over head; he rushed up the narrow broken staircase, and there, stretched on the bed, pale, and apparently all but lifeless, lay the dear venerable form of the truest friend he had in the world! On one side of her stood the doctor and two women, who had been called in to assist in applying the prescribed remedies; on the other were Dame Tomkins and Mary; the latter holding her grandmother's hand tightly pressed in her own; the poor child's face was tearless, but as pale as death. At the sight of her brother, and at the sound of his agonized cry as he entered the room, her lips quivered, and one big tear rolled down her cheek; but she did not move, she only beckoned Charley to her side, placed in his the cold hand she had been holding, and throwing her own arm round his neck, drew him tenderly towards her and whispered:—"Her last words were, 'Bless my Charley!'"

But it is not our intention to dwell here on a death-bed scene, even though it be the death of an aged

Christian, and, therefore, to her but the beginning of the better life. Enough for our readers to know, that at the same hour on that day week, Charles Layton and his sister sat alone in their desolate cottage, and mingled their tears together; their grandmother had been buried that afternoon. She had never rallied from the fit into which she had fallen about an hour-and-a-half after Charley left her; the wearied look, the ruffled temper, had been but the precursors of the fatal attack. She had been spared all other suffering; and as she had, to use her own words, set her house in order long ago, her sudden death might be regarded as a mercy; but it was a heavy blow to her grandchildren. For the first few days Charley was inconsolable, for the sting of self-reproach was added to the stroke of bereavement; he had refused his grandmother her last request; to indulge an idle fancy he had forsaken her, as it were, in her dying moments; it was nothing to him that death had come unexpectedly; she herself, it might be, had felt something of its approach, though his careless eye, intent only on its own gratification, had failed to see it. And this was the return he had made her for all her love and devotion. Such were some of the thoughts that passed through his mind, as he gazed for the last time on those beloved features which, in life, had never looked otherwise than kindly on him. It was in vain that Mary, putting aside for the moment her own deep grief, tried to comfort him. It was in vain that she told him how fondly his grandmother had spoken of him

after his departure; how she had blessed them both, and called them her comforts and her joy; and how her last prayer of all had been for him.' Every fresh proof of her affection did but add to his grief and his remorse.

While the young Laytons were thus sorrowing beside their dead, other events had been taking place in the village; and in a day or two the news found its way even into the house of mourning, that Jim Larkin had been taken up for poaching in Squire Grantley's preserves, and that Joe Higgins, who was suspected of having been his companion, had suddenly disappeared from the place. Charley heard these tidings with dismay; for he remembered how, in his anxiety to keep Joe out of mischief, he had all but made up his mind to venture with him along the forbidden path, trusting to his own good intentions for an excuse, if discovered; he felt that he had had a narrow escape. But poor Charley knew not then, though he would be sure to hear it later, that village gossip, always ready to take the least charitable view of things, was already busy with his good name. The report had spread like wildfire, that he had been seen in company with Higgins and Larkin, standing at the gate of the plantation at a late hour on the previous evening, and that the sudden summons to his grandmother's death bed, had alone prevented his going further. There is an old and homely saying, "No one can touch pitch without being defiled," and Charley had not consorted so long with Joe Higgins, and boys of his stamp, without bearing some of their

reproach. This, then, was the time for busy gossips to remember how often they had said that young Layton would come to no good, that he was following his father's steps, and that boys that were made so much of always turned out worse than others. And while Charley stood beside his grandmother's coffin, and thought, with an almost bursting heart, that if he could but have her back he would never again do anything contrary to her wishes, and that his whole life should be devoted to her comfort, young women over their washtubs and old women over their cups of tea, were saying to each other what a good thing it was that the Widow Layton had been taken away just in time to escape the trouble and disgrace that that boy of hers would have been sure to have brought on her. So true is it, that in all ranks, and at all periods of life, a man is judged of by the company he keeps.

To return, however, to the evening of the funeral. It was the last but one that the brother and sister were to spend at the cottage, for Mary's kind friend, Mrs. Grantley, had now made her in earnest the offer she had only hinted at two years before, that she should go and live at the Grange as under nursemaid; and hard as it was to part from Charley, it was an offer not to be refused. Their little home was therefore to be broken up, and it had been settled that Charley should lodge with a respectable couple in the village, who happened to have a small unfurnished room, in which he could place his own bed, and a few things of their grandmother's which they

wished to keep by them; the rest were to be sold to pay the expenses of the funeral.

When the two or three neighbours who had shewn their respect to Widow Layton by following her to the grave, had taken leave of them, the brother and sister sat down together in the dim light of their one small candle, and wept bitterly. Charley's grief was the most violent, for Mary struggled hard to restrain hers, that she might comfort her brother. For some time she tried in vain, till finding her own words fail, she opened the Bible, and turning to her favorite chapter, the twenty-first of Revelations, began to read. She could not have chosen better; as she proceeded Charley became calmer; he seemed to be taking in every word as it fell from her lips, and when she closed the book, he drew her fondly to him, and said, "How I shall miss you, Mary!"

"But you will come and see me twice every week, Mrs. Grantley says you may," replied Mary, her tears bursting forth again, in spite of her efforts to restrain them; "and we shall see each other at Church twice every Sunday. I've been thinking, Charley, you must take dear Granny's Bible with you, and I can have yours."

"But would you not like to have it, Mary?"

Mary could not say but that she should, for there was nothing belonging to them that she prized half so much; but she had settled it in her own mind that Charley must have it, and so, carefully guarding her words that she might not give utterance to an untruth, she replied, "I shall like you to have it

always in your room, and then you can read it every night and morning; and see, here are the leaves turned down at Granny's favorite chapters, and her marks against some of the verses; it will be almost like talking with her to read in that book, will it not?"

Charley felt that it would, and he rather wondered that his sister was so willing to give it up; but he was very glad of it; he knew nothing of the self-denial it cost her.

"And her old arm chair!" said Mary, "you'll be sure to take care of that, and keep it well dusted, won't you?"

Charley promised that he would, and the next day the Bible and the arm chair were both carefully placed by Mary herself in her brother's little room; his clothes neatly mended and packed together were also conveyed thither, with the very few articles of furniture the space would accommodate; the rest was taken away in various directions. As the brother and sister stood for a few minutes in the empty room in which they had spent their happy childhood, and thought how completely they were now alone in the world, their hearts seemed more closely knit together than they had ever been before, and yet, for the first time in their lives, they were about to live apart.

"Charley! let us both try and serve God faithfully, and then He will be sure to bless us, wherever we are; dear Granny said He would."

These were Mary's last words as her brother took up the box containing her modest wardrobe, to carry

it to the Grange. On their way they called to say a parting word to Dame Tomkins, who had been a great comfort to them during their week of sorrow; and in another hour the brother and sister had entered each on their different path in life.

CHAPTER XII.

MARY LAYTON IN SERVICE.

It took Mary several weeks to get reconciled to her new life. The Grange, it is true, was much more pleasant to live at than the little cottage in the lane, and she had comforts there which she had never so much as heard of before, and yet she could never think of her dear old home without feeling inclined to shed tears. She had a great many fellow-servants, and all were friendly and kind to the orphan girl who had come amongst them; but none of them could make up to her the loss of her grandmother and brother. At every turn she missed the dear venerable form over which she had lately watched with so much tenderness, and still more she missed the wise counsel to direct and guide her, and which she had never seemed to need so much as now. How often of an evening did her heart yearn to hear Charley's cheerful whistle, or his loud and merry song; and even when anything occurred to give her pleasure, her joy was tinged with sadness at the thought that her brother was no longer by to share it with her. Still, it must not be supposed that Mary wilfully gave way to a discontented and unthankful spirit,

although she did feel as if she never could be happy again. Many an affectionate-hearted girl has felt the same on first going out to service; but happily, constant occupation soon takes off the first sharp edge of sorrow, and although it was impossible that Mary could forget her grandmother, or cease to mourn her separation from Charley, she was not long in finding out, that a young servant who conscientiously tries to do her duty, and so wins the regard and respect of her employers, can scarcely fail to be happy.

Mary Layton was indeed very fortunate in this her first place. Mrs. Grantley had taken her into her family with the benevolent wish to make her good and useful, and few mistresses understood better than she did how to set about it; kind and gentle in manner, yet very firm of purpose, no child, from her own high-spirited Edith to the tiniest babe in the Infant School, which she had lately established, ever thought of disobeying her. Had Mary fallen into less judicious hands, she might at this turning point of her life, when the death of her grandmother had left her without any natural protector, have fancied herself her own mistress, and so have fallen into many mistakes; but no such idea ever occurred to her now; she saw that whatever Mrs. Grantley required of her was for her good, that she never reproved her without a cause, and above all that she was one of those mistresses who look well to the ways of their household, and was therefore sure to detect any neglect of duty in her servants.

Luckily, too, the old nurse took a great liking to

Mary. It was such a comfort, as she said to her mistress, to have a girl in the nursery, who not only knew how to do things, but could be trusted to do them without constant watching; who could run a seam in a child's frock and not pucker it, wash up cups and saucers without breaking them, and go on an errand to the kitchen without stopping half-an-hour to gossip. As for Edith, she kept her Mamma to her word, and chose to adopt Mary as her own maid, confessing at the same time, that she liked her much better in the neat black dress which Mrs. Grantley had provided her with, than in the old patched print frock in which she had first seen her.

And so by degrees Mary's heart grew lighter; she thought less of her past trials and more of her present blessings, and learned to love her new home without forgetting her old one; but still, the happiest days of the week were those on which Charley paid his evening visits to the Grange; then for an hour or two she was allowed to have him all to herself, for Mrs. Grantley knew how fondly the brother and sister clung to each other, and how much the future happiness of both might depend on this feeling of affection being kept alive in their hearts.

Charley's new home was far from being as comfortable a one to him as Mary's was to her; not but that the people with whom he lived were respectable enough, and kind too in their way, but it was not the sort of kindness to which he had been accustomed; they had but two children, and those two took up so much of their mother's time, that she had but very

little to bestow on her young lodger, and as they were both thoroughly spoiled, the comfort of every body about them had often to be sacrificed to theirs; thus Charley, and even their own father, was sometimes driven up quite into a corner to eat his meals, that these young tyrants might not be disturbed in their play, and now and then there seemed some danger of the dinner or supper being set aside altogether, if a fit of unusual fretfulness on the part of her over-indulged boys, had put poor Mrs. Gosset herself out of humour.

But Charley was very fond of children, and at first he spared no pains to win over these two curley-headed blue-eyed youngsters, who wanted nothing but good management to make them as charming as boys of their age generally are; but in his zeal for the improvement of their manners, it was his plan to frown when they frowned, and scold when they scolded, he therefore met with but little success; and as he was not himself a pattern of patience, he did not always rest quiet under the indignity of having to yield to all their whims and fancies; but it was of little use his turning restive, for Mrs. Gosset was a woman who chose to have her own way in her own house, and as her husband was a good-natured easy man, who never interfered in domestic matters so long as his dinner and supper were ready for him at the proper time, there was no one to whom to appeal; it will be supposed from all this that Charley and his hostess did not live in perfect harmony together, and that there was little to attach

him to his present home, a home so different from that which had formerly been his, and which, as he often owned to himself with a pang of self-reproach, he had not known how fully to value until he had lost it. He was now seldom indoors, except at meal times, his evenings being often spent in lounging about with other idle lads, watching their neighbours as they passed, and listening to, though he had not yet learned to join in, rude and unbecoming jests, or impertinent remarks about them; but still oftener he would join his fellow workmen, Forbes and Elliot, and if there was any fun, as they called it, going on in any of the neighbouring towns or villages, they were sure to be there, doing no harm they would have said, but wasting precious hours that might have been as happily and much more usefully employed elsewhere, and acquiring tastes and habits which would, if indulged, lead to harm by and by.

All this time, however, Charley was firm on one point; he never broke his promise to his grandmother about going to a public-house, although we are sorry to be obliged to confess that he was not equally mindful of her wishes about Downham Fair, though he went as usual rather to escape being laughed at for not going, than from any pleasure he expected to find there; he saw, as he afterwards admitted to Mary, a great many foolish and some disgusting sights, heard a great deal of bad language, and spent more money than he could afford to part with; he was very anxious to keep this frolic of his a secret from his sister, but such secrets are not easily kept. She heard

of it from one of her fellow servants, whose cousin had met him on his way to the fair, and Charley was not a little surprised the next time he called at the Grange to hear her ask, "How could you go to that wicked place? Did you forget what dear Granny said?"

Charley could not say that he did forget it, for he had been thinking of it all the time he was there, and he was obliged to find some other excuse which did not at all satisfy his sister, and only half satisfied himself.

Although we have not had occasion lately to mention Philip Burls, that worthy still continued to live in the village, that is to say he made his home there, although he was often away for months, and once even for years together. He generally went away poor, and came back with plenty of money in his pocket, a circumstance that naturally led people to wonder what he had been doing all the time. Some thought he had been a voyage to the Indies, because he always had so many foreign articles in his possession, but others, less charitable, would whisper that he was connected with a gang of smugglers, and had been carrying on his illicit trade in distant parts of the country; but if so, he always managed to escape detection.

Charley Layton had a particular dislike to this man Burls; he had noticed that his grandmother, who never spoke ill of any one, never spoke of him at all; but that whenever she saw him coming towards her, she always turned into a house or down a bye lane,

to avoid him; and if by any accident she was obliged to meet him, her only salutation was a distant nod, very different from the courteous and smiling "Good morning," or "Good evening," with which she greeted the rest of her neighbours. Then there was something in the consequential, patronizing air, which Burls always assumed towards him, that greatly offended Charley; and when one evening he saw him, for the first time after one of his long absences, he would, had it been possible, have shunned him, but it was not, for they came suddenly and unexpectedly on each other:

"Well, youngster! how are you? I don't often catch a sight of you now-a-days."

"I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Burls! Pray, how do you do?" said Charley, civilly.

"O! I'm hearty enough; but what a strapping fellow you're growing; the very image of your father, too, as I'm alive!"

Charley was pleased to hear that; his grandmother had often told him how good looking his father was, and it flattered his vanity to be thought like him; his face therefore brightened into a pleasant smile, as he replied, "My grandmother always said I was."

"O! she did, did she? And so you've lost the old woman, I hear; I'd never thought she'd have given you the slip so soon; she looked strong enough to live for ever!"

The pleasant smile flitted rapidly away, as Charley listened to this irreverent mention of his grandmother, and his voice changed strangely, as he answered:

"She was never very strong, Mr. Burls; only she didn't complain so much as some folks do."

"Well! strong or weak, she's gone now, any how! and I suppose you young ones miss her a bit, for finely she cosseted you! What's become of the girl?"

Charley was fast losing his temper; he moved from side to side of the footpath, eager for an opportunity to escape, but Burls stood so as to fill it up before him.

"My sister is gone to live at Squire Grantley's at the Grange," he answered, coolly.

"O! she's got amongst the big folks, has she? much good that will do her; I suppose you know your father was an old crony of mine."

Charley did not know it; and from the general character of Burls's cronies now, he felt some surprise to hear it. Philip Burls, he thought, was the last man in the world he should have chosen for a friend; but then he was doubtless altered for the worse since his father's time.

"Yes, we were like brothers," resumed Burls, "and a very good fellow he was, till he took to—"

"Stop! Mr. Burls, if you please," cried Charley, in a voice so loud and decided, that Burls stopped in spite of himself. "I'd rather not hear anything more about my father. My grandmother told me all she thought right, and of course she must have known him better than anybody else. Good evening, Mr. Burls; it's fine weather, isn't it?" And jumping off the raised footpath into the middle of the road, he started a quick pace homewards.

"O! that's you're move, is it, you proud young puppy?" said Burls, to himself, as he stood gazing after the retreating figure of the boy; "pretty airs those for the son of a drunkard and the companion of poachers to give himself, and he a poacher, too, at heart, if all's true that one hears; we must bring him down a peg or two, I fancy. Well, Joe will be back again before long, and then we'll see what can be done," and with this charitable resolve Mr. Burls resumed his walk.

Charley meanwhile reached his lodgings in no very pleasant mood; he was always sensitive on the subject of his father, for it had not escaped his notice, that while his mother was often spoken of by the neighbours in terms of respect and regret, the name of his other parent was scarcely ever mentioned in his own or his grandmother's presence; he had sometimes wondered at this, and a sort of dread had come over him that there was something connected with his family history, which it was thought right to keep from him. Burls's language had just now strengthened this belief, and the fear that the secret was about to be revealed by him from whom, of all people, he would least wish to hear it, had caused him to stop him so abruptly.

At the door of his lodgings he met his sister. Mrs. Grantley had given her leave to spend a couple of hours in looking over her brother's wardrobe, which the anxious little maiden feared was not so well cared for as it ought to be, but which she was sure a little of her own handy-work would quickly set to rights.

After standing a few minutes outside they passed into the house, where Mary stopped to speak to Mrs. Gosset, and to attempt to caress the fretful child in her arms, from whom she got nothing but a scratched face in return, and then went up to Charley's room. There he told her of his meeting with Burls, and quite shocked her gentle nature by the violence of his expressions of dislike towards him; not that Mary was by any means fond of Mr. Burls herself, but, unlike girls in general, she had learned better than her manly brother, to control that "unruly evil," the tongue.

By the time Charley's wardrobe had been duly spread out and examined, and sundry rents and tears had been repaired by Mary's active fingers, her two hours were nearly exhausted, and as she was very careful to return punctually, she was just going to leave the room, when a sudden thought struck her.

"O! Charley! where's dear Granny's Bible? I do so long to look at it."

Charley's face turned very red, but at that moment his attention was drawn to something passing along the road, and he called his sister to the window.

"Look! Mary, at this splendid pie-bald horse."

"Yes, I know," said Mary, carelessly, "it belongs to young Mr. Ascot, he often comes to the Grange on it; but do shew me your Bible, where is it?"

Charley saw there was no escape for him; so he pointed to an out-of-the-way shelf where, defaced with dust, and bearing on its honoured cover the drippings of a glue pot, which, together with an old

bird cage, and the sides of a small deal box, had been placed upon it, lay the Bible which had, for nearly fifty years, been Mrs. Layton's most treasured possession.

Mary looked at it in dismay! "O! Charley!" were the only words she spoke, but they were enough to tinge her brother's honest cheek with shame, while from his less truthful tongue they called forth words that were almost angry ones.

"Well, Mary, you forget; I haven't so much time for reading as you have; I'm out at work all day, and at night I'm tired, and glad to go to bed."

Poor Charley! he was, you see, or tried to be, a self-deceiver; he wished to forget altogether the many evening hours he was in the habit of wasting. But Mary had not meant to reproach him, she was too thoroughly grieved for that; she saw that her darling brother did not love God's Word, that it was not to him a holy book, a light to guide him on his way to heaven; she knew that if he did not read the Scriptures he could not love Him of whom they testify, and, according to her simple faith, not to love the Saviour, was to be walking always in the pathway of danger; but although these thoughts passed through her mind, she did not give utterance to them. Her time was up, and silently kissing Charley on the forehead, she took her way downstairs, closely followed by her brother; he had intended to walk home with her, but he dared not do so now, for he was afraid she would talk to him of their grandmother, and remind him of things which he would much

rather forget. He stood and watched her till she was out of sight, and then returned to his room. He took down the Bible, dusted it, and tried to remove the stains, then opening it began to read; but though he turned over page after page he found no comfort. The words seemed dull, the meaning confused, and no wonder! his heart was not in a right state to receive that heavenly wisdom, which those who desire to possess will "seek for as silver, and search for as for hid treasure." Weary with reading words that no longer interested him, he dropped his head on his folded arms, and began to look back upon the past. He remembered how regularly he had read the Bible for the first three months after his grandmother's death, and how the words read over-night had returned to his memory in the morning, and often occupied his mind while he was at work; he had been happy then, for while dwelling on her favorite passages he had often seemed, as Mary had said he would, to be listening to his grandmother's voice. Then he recollected how Ned Elliot had one evening come into his room, and seeing the Bible open on the table, had sat down before it, and playfully said that he was going to act "Parson Charley"; but he never knew till years afterwards, that at that very time Elliot, in his heart, respected his young companion all the more for being a Bible reader, and that he had sat for some moments with his eyes fixed, thinking whether it might not be better for him if he followed his example, and took to reading his Bible too. But of this, as we have said, Charley knew nothing; and

from that time he again grew careless, laid his Bible by upon the shelf, and persuaded himself that it was very foolish of him to try to be different from others, and that it only rendered him a fit butt for the ridicule of his friends; thus was Charley's religion once more cast aside; but he was not happy, though nothing could have induced him to own it; and to hide his dissatisfaction with himself, he put on an appearance of increased gaiety; he sought the acquaintance of many of the village lads with whom he had never associated before, and was always foremost in every frolic, laughing louder than the rest, and never giving any one reason to suppose that his laughter was often but as the "crackling of thorns under a pot."

Mary now, to her great sorrow, again missed Charley from his seat in Church; but she did not know all; for there was a barrier raised between the brother and sister, and neither dared, as they had once done, tell all their thoughts to the other; she had narrowly escaped, on one or two occasions, seeing Charley among the crowd of idlers assembled at the Church gate to watch, and some of them to scoff at, those who were passing in to worship God; not that Charley was himself a scoffer, the memories of the past forbade that; and he had slunk behind the rest, and held down his head with shame, as he listened to the rude jests uttered by his companions, but he had, more from thoughtlessness than from inclination, mixed himself up with the "fools who make a mock of sin"; and a sharper lesson than any he had

yet received, was needed to convince him that, "though the Lord may correct but in measure, yet those who neglect Him will He not leave altogether unpunished." Such a lesson was soon to be given him.

Not many weeks after Charley's meeting with Burls, Joe Higgins once more made his appearance in the village; his return was as sudden as his going away had been. No charge had ever been brought against him, for he had not been seen in the plantation on the night of Larkin's capture, and the only evidence to connect him with the matter was that of the man who had stopped to speak to Charles Layton, and which told as much against the latter as it did against Higgins; his sudden flight had, however, at the time, fixed suspicion very strongly upon him, but it had now blown over; and as Larkin, on his release from prison, had joined himself with other bad characters, and left the neighbourhood altogether, it was hoped that Joe would now take warning from the past, and settle down to honest labour; this trust in him was strengthened by the great change for the better that had taken place in his appearance and manners. His dress was more respectable and his habits were more regular than in former times; and as he had always been an object of pity to many, he received a kinder welcome back than might have been expected.

Charles Layton had, however, his own private reasons for believing that Joe had not run away without a good reason for doing so, and although he

would not quite turn his back on his old acquaintance now that he seemed on the point of mending his ways, he resolved never again to risk the loss of his own good name through being too intimate with him; but Charley had yet to learn how vain are the best resolutions when made in our own strength; he had put from him that Word of the Lord, which is given to be a "Light unto our feet and a lamp unto our paths." How, then, could he do otherwise than stumble?

Mary, meanwhile, knew nothing of Joe's return, when one day Mrs. Grantley having given her some commission in the village, she set off as soon as the nursery tea was over, and after paying a short visit to Dame Tomkins, was proceeding on her way, when she saw some one coming towards her whom she thought very like Higgins, only so much taller and more respectable looking; but she was about to pass him without further notice, had not his sly, downcast look, as he crossed to the other side of the road, convinced her that he was no other than her brother's old acquaintance, and she was, it must be owned, anything but well-pleased at the discovery.

Mary's dislike of this lad had not been lessened, either by time or absence; and it was not a dislike of his bad qualities only, but, strange to say, partook of the same feeling of jealousy as it did when years ago she first looked upon him as a sort of rival in her brother's affections; being therefore to a certain extent selfish, it might be said to form the one unamiable trait in her otherwise sweet dis-

position. Perhaps Mary was conscious of this, for she tried very hard to persuade herself that Charley did not know of Joe's return, or he would have told her of it, and also to believe that the circumstances under which they had parted would, of themselves, form a bar to any further intimacy; and if Joe would but keep out of her brother's way, she felt as if she could wish him well, and rejoice in any improvement that might have taken place in him.

These thoughts occupied her mind until she reached Mrs. Gosset's door, where, on enquiring for Charley, she found that he had gone out half-an-hour before; vexed at having missed him she was turning away, when he came running hastily up; on seeing her he stopped short and looked, Mary thought, not quite so glad to see her as she expected he would be; but somehow Charley did not always now look as good humoured and pleasant as he used to do; he welcomed her, however, kindly enough, asked after the health of the family at the Grange, and greatly admired a beautiful rose which her mistress had given her, and which she had carefully preserved as a present for him; but when she asked him to walk back with her he looked confused, and began to make excuses; "he was sorry, very sorry indeed, but that evening he was so particularly busy; if it had but been to-morrow instead; to-morrow he would go and spend two whole hours with her, but to night, he wished he could tell her why, but he really could not go!" And as Mary saw plainly that he was in a hurry to get rid of her, she forced back a little sigh of vexation, shook hands with him, and crossed

over to Mr. Gilmore's shop. There she was detained for nearly half-an-hour; and on coming out she stood for a minute or two looking up and down the street, with a sort of forlorn hope that she might again fall in with her brother, and persuade him to accompany her; but the street was empty, and she was just moving on, when she saw two persons coming out of what was called Ivy Lane, and at once recognized them as Charley and Joe Higgins.

Mary felt her face flush with jealous anger. Was it then for his sake that she was to be neglected? could her own brother, her well-beloved Charley, the companion of her childhood, who had now so few opportunities of being with her, prefer the company of that low, bad boy, to hers! then was she indeed very miserable, and the tears began to chase each other down her cheeks! but as she wept, she continued to watch the retreating pair. "They must be going for a walk! Charley had time to walk with him, though not with her! there they went, past the pond, past the mill, past the Rising—— no! they were stopping there! Why, surely her eyes must deceive her! it could not be possible—and yet it was so, for they were turning in! Yes, they had actually disappeared, and the door of the Rising Sun had closed behind them!"

Mary could have seen no more if there had been more to see, for her eyes were blinded with tears. Amid all Charley's faults he had, as she very well knew, ever kept his resolution on this one point; and she had often heard it said, that so long as a young

man kept himself from the public-house, there were hopes of his turning out well; but now this could be said of him no longer, for he was there and in company too, with Joe Higgins. Mary's first thought was, what would dear Granny have felt had she lived to see that? And then came a sense of relief to the poor girl's heart, as she remembered that her grandmother had gone where sorrow and crying are known no more. But she was obliged to hasten home, for night was coming on apace, and she was alone; the brother who ought to have been there to protect her, had shut himself away from her, and let her need be ever so great, she felt that where he was she should not dare to follow him.

When she reached the Grange the children were already in bed, and as neither Mrs. Grantley nor nurse would require her further services at present, she gladly shut herself into her own little room, and remembering to whom her grandmother had always gone in every time of trouble, she knelt down to pray; but though she uttered words, her heart went not with them; try as she would to draw it off, it still lingered with Charley in that resort of sin and danger, in which she had so lately left him; so she rose from her knees, and longing to find comfort somewhere, opened her Bible. For some time she sought in vain; there were promises and there were precepts in rich abundance, but they did not seem to be for her. Others might find solace in them, she could not, her sorrow was so very great. At length she turned in despair to the chapter that came in her

daily course of reading; it was the fourteenth of Matthew, and presently these words occurred:— "And when Peter saw the wind boisterous he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me, and immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said, O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt."

They were just what she needed; for is not Jesus, she thought, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"? And cannot He, in every danger, save now as He saved then? nothing is wanting but faith in Him. And again kneeling down, Mary was able to pray fervently, that the Lord would still watch over her brother, in the midst of the dangers and temptations into which he had cast himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOE FINDS CHARLEY CHANGED FOR THE BETTER.

We must now explain the circumstances which had led Charley Layton to break a promise so solemnly made, and to do what, but a few hours before he would have thought the most unlikely thing in the world for him to do, pay a visit to the Rising Sun.

We have said, that on Joe Higgins's return, Charley had made up his mind not to resume his former intimacy with him, but it is always much more easy to take up with bad companions, than to shake them off again; and Joe had no intention of losing a friend for want of keeping close to him; besides, he found Charley very much changed since he went away. The careful, and as Joe had thought her, stern old grandmother, and the pure-minded, sharp-eyed little sister, into whose presence he himself had never cared to go, were no longer there to controul him, and he had become much more like other boys; he did not now, as he had used to do, start and look angry at every slip of the tongue; he could enjoy a frolic as well as any lad in the village, and was altogether a much pleasanter fellow than

when he was kept cooped up in that dull cottage. Yes! Phil Burls was right! he must stick to Charley Layton, and who knew but that some day they might be able to help one another on a bit. He'd always liked Charley, and always should; and he liked him especially now that he wasn't so over particular about trifles; and so let Charley go where he would, Joe Higgins was sure to turn up somewhere near him. At first he felt vexed at this, and tried very hard to avoid him; but when he saw, or fancied he saw, that his old school-fellow retained all his former regard for him, he began to relent, and to feel that he was not doing as he should like to be done by; and thus they grew, by degrees, to be very much on their former footing. Still Charley thought that he would rather Mary did not know this, and was therefore careful not to mention Joe to her.

While the two boys were on these terms with each other, they met one day under the Old Market Place, and Joe asked Charley if he had seen those beautiful birds in Jansen's window!

"Birds? no! what birds are they?" asked Charley.

"O! they're called Love Birds; Phil Burls brought them from somewhere in the Indies; come along and look at them; they're the biggest beauties alive!"

Charley turned and went with him, and found the birds quite as beautiful as Joe had described them to be; just fit, he thought, with their curious Indian cage, for the young ladies at the Grange, and he eagerly asked if they were to be sold.

"Sold! I should think not, indeed!" said Joe,

looking very knowing; "they're much too dear for anybody about here to buy! Why I don't suppose there's more than half-a-dozen such in England; pretty dears! look how they hop about and peck at each other; aren't they beauties, Charley?"

"Aye! that they are, and no mistake!" said Charley, flattening his nose against the window-pane to get a closer view of them.

For several evenings he regularly paid a visit to the Love Birds, which continued to occupy the same place, and every time he saw them he felt the wish return that they were for sale, at such a price as that he could buy them for Mary to make a present of to her little ladies; great then was his delight, when one evening Joe came running up to him, to tell him that Burls meant to have a raffle for them!

"A raffle! what's that?" asked Charley, innocently.

"What! don't you know what a raffle is? well, I never heard of such ignorance as that before!" and Charley felt almost ashamed of the admission he had made.

"Why, a raffle's about the same as a lottery; but I suppose you don't know what a lottery is neither, do you?"

No, Charley did not; and again Joe's countenance expressed the deepest contempt.

"Well! it just means this: every body pays, say a shilling a-piece, till they've made up as much as a thing's worth, and then they have tickets and draw for it, and he who chances to get the prize has it."

"But isn't it cheating?" asked honest Charley.

"Cheating! no, of course it isn't; you always call everything cheating, you do!"

"Well, I've heard my grandmother say, that when folks talk of chance, they often mean cheating."

"I say it means no such thing!" said Joe, warmly. "And now I want to know whether you're going to have a ticket or not; mind, it's your last chan— opportunity, for they're a'most all gone a'ready!"

"Well, if you're sure it's quite fair, I don't mind if I do," said Charley. "I should like to have them of all things."

"And I daresay you'll win them," replied Joe. "I know you're a lucky fellow, and it all depends on that."

And so the matter was settled; Charley paid his shilling, and became the possessor of a ticket, Joe being the go between, and Burls keeping himself in the background. As to when or where the birds were to be drawn for, Charley did not concern himself about it; his only wish was, to possess them at a cost not beyond his humble means, and to hand them over to his sister, who, he knew, had not yet seen them.

It was only about twenty minutes before the brother and sister met at Mrs. Gosset's door, that Charley had heard from Higgins that the raffle was to take place within an hour at the Rising Sun!

"What! at a public-house!" exclaimed Charley, in dismay, "and at that low place too! then thank ye, I'd rather have nothing to do with it; I'd rather have my shilling back again."

"Yes, that's a likely thing, indeed!" said Joe. "D'ye think then shillings is give to be took back again? No! if you don't choose to come you will lose your chance!"

"Chance again!" thought Charley, "how I hate that word."

"Come, be quick! you must make up your mind, and at once!" said Joe.

"I shan't go there to draw for them," returned Charley. "I promised my grandmother I wouldn't, and so I won't!"

"Why, your grandmother's dead now; promises to people don't hold after they're dead!"

"Don't they? then I think they ought!"

"Well, if ever I heard the like of that! Won't Will Forbes and Ned Elliott and all the rest of them chaff you finely, when I tell them why you ain't a coming."

"What, are Forbes and Elliott to be there?" asked Charley, with the slightest possible change of voice.

"To be sure! a'most everybody's to be there; but I say, Charley, I suppose your Granny mean't that you wasn't to go to a public-house to drink; now 'tisn't for that we're going, you know; why, I'll be bound she wouldn't have minded going herself to get hold of them birds; besides, Burls has took the parlour that we may have it all snug to ourselves."

"Well, to be sure," Charley thought, "that did make all the difference." And now he recollected the promise was, that he would not sit down to

drink in a public-house, and he need not sit down at all; it was the old story, he was too particular; he had heard his master say the other day, that Forbes and Elliott were two very respectable young men; and if they were not afraid to go to this raffle, why should he be?

As these thoughts were passing through his mind, Joe again burst forth: "Come, you must say one way or t'other, Charley; I can't wait any longer, I've got to go to Spring Hill yet, and must be back in half-an-hour; d'ye mean to go or lose your shilling, and the chance of the birds along with it, for I know you'll win them."

Thus pressed what could Charley do? There was one thing he should have done, but he did it not! He should have recalled to mind a precept which he had read many times, and which, if he had obeyed now, he would have saved himself and others many hours of sorrow and perplexity: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Instead, however, of listening to the voice of conscience or the voice of God, he followed the leadings of his own heart, and replied: "Well, if you're sure Forbes and Elliott are to be there, I don't mind going with you for once, but—"

"I'll call for you in half-an-hour," interrupted Joe; and in something less than that time, for when he met Mary he was dreadfully afraid she was come to spoil their sport, he presented himself at Charley's lodgings, and, to his great contentment, found him alone and ready to accompany him.

On entering the public-house, Charley looked

anxiously round for his farm friends, but they were neither of them there, nor were there any others with whom he had much acquaintance. He recognized a great many of the least respectable men of the village with Burls at their head; one of these welcomed him coarsely.

"Glad to see you, Layton, my boy, very glad to see you, though I thought you was a deal too good to come among such a set of wild fellows as us."

"Them's the sort of lads I like to see come," said another, garnishing his discourse with words with which we had rather not sully our pages; "it shews that, with all their canting ways, they're not better than the rest of us when it comes to the point."

"But I say, Tom, the old lady wouldn't much have relished it if she'd been alive, would she?" said the first speaker.

"No! and I suppose the young'un doesn't either; but you see he's got out of his leading strings at last."

The latter part of this short conversation had been carried on in what was intended for an undertone; but Charley's quick ear, sharpened by a suspicion that they were talking of him, heard every word of it; it needed not this, however, to recall the memory of his grandmother, or of his broken promise; already he would have given everything he possessed to have been able to recall the last hour; but he saw there was now no escape for him; still he continued to stand close to the door; he would be true to the letter, although he had broken through the spirit

of his promise; but he was no longer his own master!

"Sit down, you youngster, and let in the light from yon window," cried Burls, in an authoritative tone, that the boy felt afraid to disobey, and he slunk into a seat beside Joe Higgins, who, with several others, was listening to Burls's account of the native country of the Love Birds, where he said the whole feathered race were green, blue, and yellow, and the flies all gold, and where the people were so grand, that they did nothing all day long but lie on couches and be fanned.

"Very pleasant that," said Higgins; "but I wonder how they feel as fans them"; at which remark there was a general laugh, for a very little wit goes a great way in such scenes.

At this interruption Burls became angry with Joe, and called him by a name that was anything but complimentary; still, as the laugh was rather against him, he was glad to turn it off by directing his attention to Charley, whose health he drank, and then passing the mug round, he invited him to drink in turn. The poor boy stood too much in awe of Burls, now that he saw him at the head of his choice associates, to dare to refuse; but the taste of the beer was so different from that of the wholesome home-brewed, of which he occasionally partook at the Farm, that he scarcely wetted his lips with it. The talk now became more general, and a very ill-looking man who, as Charley knew, had been discharged by Mr. Bradford but a few days before for

ill-behaviour, began to speak against his late master, whom he held up to his companions as an unfeeling tyrant, and the great enemy of the labouring man. Charley's face burned with honest indignation at hearing his master thus falsely described; nay, more, he felt ashamed of being obliged to sit still and listen to it; but what could he do? Most of those present seemed to be on the best of terms with the speaker, and to judge from their replies, were very much of the same opinion as he was. "I only wish," thought Charley, "that Elliott and Forbes were here, see if we wouldn't make that fellow hold his tongue." But time passed, yet no Forbes or Elliott came, and when he whispered an enquiry about them to Higgins, he affected not to understand him; all this while there was no sign of preparation for the raffle; the beer was passed round again, and strange to say, Charley did not find it quite so unpleasant the second time of tasting as it had been the first; he began too, to feel a little amused at what was going on around him, especially at the skirmishes which were constantly taking place between Burls and Higgins, who seemed at one moment to be fast friends, and the next bitter enemies. Presently he even ventured to take a part in the conversation, and when the ill-looking man began again to rail against Mr. Bradford, he had grown so daring, that he actually ventured to speak a word in his master's defence! But the very sound of that young voice, raised in the cause of truth and justice, called forth a burst of rude mirth; and when the ill-looking man proceeded to question him as to

what were his notions about people's rights, he found his answers so turned and twisted about, that he was soon glad to fall back into silence again; but he continued to listen, and whether it was that the beer, which he had now tasted for the third time, had began to confuse his ideas, or whether from being in the company of men, he really fancied that he had suddenly sprung into manhood, it ended in his thinking that he himself had been very hardly dealt by in having had to work so long for boy's wages; in short, Charley was taking counsel with the ungodly, and it is impossible to say whither it might have led him, had not his attention been suddenly attracted by the conversation of two men who were sitting on the other side of him, and who did not belong to Burls's party.

One of them was describing to the other a dreadful event that had happened in that room some twelve or fourteen years before, when a man who lived near, having, while intoxicated, quarrelled with one of his companions and got up to fight with him, stumbled and fell, and being taken up insensible, died ten minutes afterwards. As Charley listened to this recital a feeling of horror crept over him, for suddenly there again rose to his mind a confused recollection of some scene connected with his own childhood; a sound of many voices, a crowd appearing at their cottage door, a number of pale frightened-looking men carrying something heavy, and then of seeing himself caught up in some woman's arms and carried away; coupled with this came the memory of what his

grandmother had once told him in a voice choked by tears, of a man whom she knew going to spend the evening in bad company, and being brought home dead. Putting these two memories together, and comparing them with the impression he had already received, that there was some mystery connected with his family history, the frightful truth flashed upon him, that he had been hearing the account of his own father's death, and that there, on that very spot where he was himself sitting, that father had fallen, a victim to his intemperance; to sit there another moment he felt was impossible, and he started up with a cry of pain, which was not heard by those near him, only because there happened to be just then a general movement, for Burls had given notice that the time to raffle for the birds had arrived; but Charley took little heed of that, he only felt that he was being borne along by the pressure of a crowd behind him into another room, where on the table stood a cage of birds, round which they ranged themselves, he being placed close to Burls, and having Higgins and one or two others behind him; then his ears took in a confused sound, made up of coarse speeches, loud laughter, and not a few profane oaths; once a violent push from behind sent him forward with such sudden violence, that he was obliged to seize hold of Burls's coat to keep himself from falling, upon which Burls looked fiercely round, and in his roughest manner exclaimed,

"Hands off, young fellow! You seem to have taken an uncommon liking to me all at once!"

Poor Charley drew back more frightened than ever, and the confusion became still more confusing; he understood nothing of what was going on, though on looking back upon the scene the next day, he had a sort of dim recollection that Burls was himself the winner of the prize; but that he cared little for at the time, all he wanted was to get out of that place, and directly the business of the drawing was, as he supposed, over, he began to elbow his way towards the door. Burls tried to stop him:

"Where are you off to in such a bustle, you young Layton? We haven't half done with you yet!"

But Charley went on his way as if he heard him not, passing through groups of romping youths and grumbling men, angry at the loss of their shillings, until he found himself in the open air; then he began to run with a sort of vague desire to leave the agony of his discovery behind him; he directed his steps away from his home, and knew not, nor would he have cared had he known it, that a number of inquisitive eyes were looking after him from the door of the public-house, while as many voices were trying to out-talk each other, in their wonder as to what sudden freak had induced the boy to start off in such a strange manner; but Charley ran, and never stopped until he had reached one of the fields belonging to his master's farm, there he threw himself down on the ground, and burst into a fit of sobbing.

For some time he continued to weep bitterly, and, in the anguish of his heart, the words, "Father! Father!" broke from him again and again; but by

and by he grew outwardly calmer, though a passion of mingled grief, shame, and remorse, still raged within. Yes, of remorse! for Charley seemed in that hour to live his whole life over again; he understood now, for the first time, how much his grandmother had had to endure, how meekly she had borne her sorrows, and how carefully she had kept them concealed from him and his sister; most lovingly too had she shielded them from the reproach that might otherwise have fallen upon them.

Children may be sure that there are often troubles hidden deep in their parents' hearts, of which they themselves know nothing! how careful then should they be not to add to them by any fault of theirs.

It was plain enough to Charley now, why his grandmother had been so over anxious, as he had sometimes thought her, to keep him from falling into bad company, and yet how impatient had he felt under the restraint, and how often had he grieved her affectionate heart by his inattention to her wishes. It is true enough, that in comparison with many boys, Charley Layton had been a pattern of love and obedience; but he did not think so now. Every unkind word he had ever spoken to her came back to his memory, every act of selfish-indulgence that had caused him to neglect her, seemed a crime in his eyes; and now, since her death, how had he put away from him all her wise and pious counsels, and walked in "the way of his own heart and the light of his own eyes," until they had led him that evening to the very brink of a precipice, where, if he had taken but

one other step, he might have fallen never to rise again! There, as he lay stretched upon the grass, with the peaceful sky above him, and the moon casting its pure light around, these thoughts passed through his mind, and the searching of heart was good for him; it made him, for the first time in his life, acquainted with himself, and shewed him, that in ceasing to walk by his grandmother's counsels, he had also forsaken her God, and so had been left to the guidance of his own perverse and foolish will. But other and happier thoughts came presently, bringing to his memory words of comfort; he knew not in what part of God's Word they were written, he only knew that they were to be found there, and that he had learned them from the same lips that had taught him so much that was good: "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquities have I not hid; I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." It was not then too late to return into the narrow path from which he had so heedlessly strayed; the straight gate was still open to him, and the Saviour of sinners was still inviting him to enter it, and saying, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." And did Charley choose, at last, that better part? We shall see by and by. At present we will only accompany him home, where he did not arrive until nearly eleven o'clock, and then he quite alarmed good Mrs. Gossett; his face was so white and his eyes so red, and when she asked him what had kept him out so late, he scarcely attempted to

answer her, but passed at once to his room, where, for the first time for many months, he fell asleep with a prayer on his lips, and, as a natural consequence, awoke the next morning with a feeling of peace at his heart, notwithstanding the agitation through which he had passed. But Charley's punishment was not over yet!

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. GRANTLEY IS WANTED.

WHILE Mr. Grantley was reading the paper the following morning, he was called from the room, and on his return, after nearly an hour's absence, he was so grave and silent, that his wife anxiously enquired the cause.

"To tell you the truth," he replied, "I have been engaged in a very unpleasant business. Groves, the policeman, has been here to obtain a warrant against young Layton for picking a man's pocket!"

"Layton! what Layton?" asked Mrs. Grantley, eagerly; "You do not surely mean Mary's brother?"

"Indeed I do, and I am as much grieved at it for her sake, as for his."

"But he is innocent, of course, Henry?"

"Well, I hope he may be able to prove himself so, but appearances are very much against him. It seems the foolish lad went into some low public-house to attend a raffle, got up by that smuggling fellow Burls, and while the drawing was going on, Burls felt him fumbling at his coat; nothing, however, was thought of it at the time, but half-an-hour afterwards he missed his purse and its contents, amounting to ten shillings."

"All of which might very well have happened, and yet Charley Layton not have taken it!" said Mrs. Grantley, indignantly.

"That is very true," returned her husband; "but unfortunately there are other circumstances to fix suspicion upon him; he left the house in a very hurried and excited manner, and refused to return when called upon to do so; then, instead of going straight home, he ran off in an opposite direction, and was not heard of again until an hour or two after his usual time, and when questioned about it he gave a very lame account of himself."

"And what have you done in the matter?" asked his wife, anxiously.

"Granted the warrant of course, my love; and he is to be brought before Ascot and me to-morrow morning at ten o'clock!"

"And what then?"

"Well, if all be proved against him that Groves expects, I see nothing for it but that he must be committed to prison."

"To prison!" echoed Mrs. Grantley, "in a tone that shewed how little she had been prepared for such an announcement. "What then is to become of Mary? why, it will break her heart!"

"It is of her that I have been thinking," returned the Squire, compassionately; "and I am come now on purpose to consult you about it. Could you not manage to send her somewhere out of the way for the next twenty-four hours? If the poor lad fails to clear himself by that time, it will be of little use to try to conceal it from her."

"Really I know not what can be done," said Mary's kind mistress, looking deeply concerned; "but something must be decided on, and immediately too; by the by, could I not take her and the two girls to pass the night at Rose Hill. Edith has long been promised a visit to her aunt and cousins, and nurse might remain at home to take care of baby; it would not be such a very long morning's drive, would it, Henry?"

"By no means too long a one," replied her husband, "it is the very thing! But you must start at once; Calumny flies fast, and if we do not get the poor girl quickly out of the way, the whole affair will be sure to reach her ears, with a hundred ill-natured additions."

Mrs. Grantley was far too anxious to place a few miles between Mary and the scene of her brother's disgrace, to need further urging, and she lost not a moment in summoning her to her own room, where she contrived to keep her fully employed about herself and the children, until they were seated in the carriage on their way to her sister's.

The afternoon was lovely, and the country through which they passed very rich and beautiful. It was the first time in her life that Mary had ever been so far from home; under any other circumstances the drive and the prospect of the visit would have been very pleasant to her, but now her mind was too ill at ease to enjoy either; she had heard nothing of Charley since she saw him enter the public-house, he had promised to call on her that evening, and she had been looking forward to the interview with great

anxiety, for she longed to remind him of his promise, and, if possible, to persuade him not to break it a second time; and now there she was being whirled far away, without having been able even to inform him of her absence. At first, she felt very much put out about it; "it was so unkind of mistress to order her off so suddenly; a servant's lot was a hard one, make the best of it, to be always at the beck and call of others, and now, perhaps, she shouldn't see Charley for a week, and who knew what might happen, with no one to warn him from that dreadful place." Mary felt that her tears were ready to start, but presently she remembered that her time, as well as her services, belonged to those who paid her for it, and that it was very wrong of her to indulge ill humour, because her mistress's plans happened to interfere with her own; such, she thought, was not the behaviour dear Granny would have taught her; she would try to bear her disappointment patiently, and she exerted herself to amuse little Amy, and keep her from being troublesome to her Mamma, and, as is generally the case, in trying to do good to others, she did good to herself, so that by the time they reached Rose Hill, if she had not forgotten, she had at least ceased to fret over her own troubles.

At ten o'clock the next morning Charley was taken before the magistrates!

It was a mournful sight to many who had known and respected his grandmother, to see the boy she had so loved, led away by the same road along which he had, not so very long before, followed her remains

to the grave, to meet a charge which, if proved, would consign him to life-long disgrace! And it was sad too, to mark the change that had taken place in him, even within the last two or three days; there he went, the once happy, handsome, light-hearted boy, his face pale and haggard, his eyes red with crying, his dress dirty and uncared for, and his head bowed down with shame at finding himself in such a disgraceful position. Well might anxious mothers draw their children forward to look at him, and warn them, from his example, to beware of bad companions; for those even, and they were many, who did not believe Charley guilty, could not but confess that, if he had never allowed himself to be drawn into the company of such boys as Higgins, Larkin, and others like them, he would not have been in his present trouble.

When all who were concerned in the business had assembled in the justice-room, Mr. Grantley, after speaking a few words of kindly sympathy to poor Charley, proceeded to examine the several witnesses against him.

Burls, who appeared as the prosecutor, gave his evidence in a loud, unfeeling tone, that told of anything rather than sorrow at having so serious a charge to bring against the son of one who had been his friend. "He had," he said, "entered the parlour of the Rising Sun with his purse and money safe in his pocket, that while engaged, shortly afterwards, in business of his own, he had felt some one tugging at it, and, on looking round, saw the boy Layton hastily

draw away his hand, but not suspecting him of any bad intention, he had only rated him for playing off his tricks upon him, and gone on with what he was about; that presently the boy, without saying a word to anybody, started off like a shot, and though they called after him and tried to stop him, he pretended not to hear them; that when he put his hand in his pocket a few minutes afterwards he missed his purse, and then, for the first time, his supicions were directed against the accused."

This story of Burls's was confirmed by several other witnesses, especially by the ill-looking man who had spoken against Mr. Bradford, and who seemed very anxious to give it as his opinion that Charley was guilty.

Mrs. Gosset, whose temper had been sorely tried by several visits which the police had paid to her house, gave her evidence with a flood of tears; it was to the effect that her young lodger had come in full an hour-and-a-half later than usual; that there was something odd in his look and manner, and that when she began to question him, he had given an evasive answer, and gone straight to bed. So much was drawn from her, but she voluntarily declared that, from what she knew of Charley Layton, he was the last person in the world she should have supposed capable of such a crime.

Joe Higgins was a very reluctant witness, and his prevarication and evident desire to keep back what he knew, did the accused more harm than all the rest of the evidence put together. Mr. Bradford and

several others appeared to speak to Charley's former good character, and there the case closed.

After consulting together the magistrates decided on remanding the boy for a week, to give the police an opportunity of searching for the purse, and also of procuring other evidence. Burls seemed very anxious that Charley should remain in custody, but, as Mr. Bradford offered to become bail for him, there was no hesitation felt in setting him at liberty.

When both the accused and the accuser had withdrawn, the gentlemen continued for some time in close conversation; they all wished to believe Charley innocent, and yet they could not but acknowledge that there were some suspicious circumstances about the case; they found it difficult to account for his abrupt departure from the public-house, and especially for the confusion he had even now betrayed, when questioned on the subject. Whether innocent or guilty, however, they saw that there was much ill-will felt towards him by the prosecutor and his friends, all of whom were known as persons of bad character; and they mutually agreed that no stone should be left unturned to sift the matter to the bottom.

Early in the afternoon Mrs. Grantley and her little party returned. Having sent Mary upstairs to take off the children's bonnets, she eagerly enquired of her husband the result of the examination, and was much disappointed to find that, although for the present at liberty, Charley was by no means cleared; and that it had, therefore, become necessary for his sister to be made acquainted with the whole affair.

Mrs. Grantley broke it to her with the tenderness of a parent, and said everything she could think of to console her; but at first the poor girl seemed stunned. From the moment when she had seen the door of the public-house close upon her brother, a sense of some impending evil had weighed upon her heart; she had tried again and again to shake it off, but in vain; and now the blow had fallen, and it was so much more terrible a one than she had expected, that she all but sank beneath it; not that she admitted, for a single moment, a doubt of Charley's innocence; it was the thought of what he must be suffering under suspicion that cut her to the heart, for, in Mary's opinion, "A good name was indeed better than great riches."

After a little while, however, she became calmer, and then her one desire was to go and comfort her brother. To this Mr. and Mrs. Grantley offered no objection; and scarcely feeling the ground beneath her feet, she ran across the Park, up the lane, and in less than twenty minutes had lifted the latch of Charley's room door, and stood within it. He was sitting at the table with his head buried in his folded arms, but at the sound of approaching footsteps he looked up, and, seeing his sister, started from his seat, and ran towards her with a cry of agony, which poor Mary did not lose the sound of for many a long day; stooping his now tall form to meet hers, he caught her in his arms, and laying his head on her shoulder, wept piteously.

"Do not, Charley! dear Charley, pray do not fret so! You know very well you did not take that man's money."

"No! but they say I did! They say I stole it from his pocket!" said Charley, scarcely able to get out the broken words; "and master, and mistress, and Squire Grantley, and everybody believes them; and I shall never be able to clear myself."

"But the Almighty God can clear you, Charley; He knows all things, and He can make your innocence plain to everybody."

"Yes! but you see that's the worst of it, Mary! I don't deserve that He should. I've left off seeking Him, and I've done just what poor Granny told me not to do; I've gone where I didn't dare ask Him to take care of me; it's just because I've forsook Him that He'll forsake me."

"I don't think He will though," said Mary, "because you know He's so very good and merciful that He forgives our sins! He forgives them for Jesus Christ's sake; and He pities us too when we're in trouble. Don't you remember what He says in dear Granny's favorite Psalm? 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him!'" At this allusion Charley's tears flowed faster than ever.

"I have not feared Him since I left off reading that," said Charley, pointing to the Bible which now lay on the table, not open indeed, but with a rough marker put carelessly between the leaves, shewing that it had been but lately closed. "If I had feared God, I should never have gone into that place at all."

"And why did you go? Why did you not go home with me as I wanted you?" asked Mary a

little sharply, for she could not, even now, quite forget his neglect of her in favour of that Joe Higgins; but when he told her the story of the birds, and she found that he had gone to the Rising Sun in the hope of winning them for her, she felt humbled and ashamed of her petulance, and at once transferred all her anger to Joe, for having played the part of a tempter; but Charley was too generous to allow another to bear the blame of his mis-doing.

"I ought to have known better than to have given way to him. I ought to have minded what Granny had said, more than what he said. I felt all the while I was doing wrong, and yet I tried not to believe it; and now I shall never be able to clear myself, and shall have to go to prison, and be disgraced all the rest of my life."

At the sound of the word prison one great sob escaped from Mary's bosom. Surely, if such a punishment as that were in store for her brother, she could never hold up her head again; but she was there to comfort him, and not to indulge her own grief, and so she struggled hard to controul her feelings.

"But Charley, dear, you forget you cannot be really disgraced, because you are innocent, and because God knows that you are, and He will make them all know it by and by; I'm sure He will if you ask Him."

"I can't ask Him, Mary; I can't pray; I tried ever so often yesterday and this morning too, but the right words would not come."

"It's not the words that signify, it's the heart," said Mary; "shall I ask Him for you?"

This was exactly what Charley wanted; and as he gladly accepted the offer, the brother and sister knelt down together, and there Mary poured out the earnest yearnings of her heart, in simple words indeed, but so fervently, and with such strong faith in the efficacy of prayer, that Charley, as he listened, was comforted; and when he rose from his knees and looked upon his sister, he thought what a blessing she was to him; she, the once weak and helpless child, whose cradle he had rocked, whose infant steps he had guided, now become his sweet friend and counsellor. And she herself was strengthened by this her affectionate attempt to strengthen him, for the blessings we ask for others, are often showered back on our own heads. With a few parting words of tenderest sympathy, and a promise to see him every evening, for Mrs. Grantley had said she might, Mary now took leave of her brother; and all that night and the next day she was so calm, and even cheerful, that Mr. Grantley was surprised, and began to think that, after all, his children's little maid had not so much feeling as he gave her credit for; but his wife, who knew her better, told him that, in her opinion, the calmness she displayed originated in that gracious promise, "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is staid on Thee."

It is not to be supposed that an event such as that we have described, could take place in a small country village, without giving rise to a great deal of gossip,

and public opinion was, as usual, much divided about it. Poor Charley had nearly as many enemies as he had friends; those persons, for instance, who in days gone by had foretold that he would come to no good, seemed rather glad than otherwise that their predictions were about to be fulfilled, while the followers of such characters as Burls and Larkin were well satisfied to find, in the mis-doings of one of those "canting Church-goers," as they were accustomed to call them, a sort of excuse for their own. Many, however, felt a deep pity for the orphan boy, who had never known a father's guidance; and whose heedlessness and high spirits, rather than any vicious inclinations, had brought him into this trouble. With these, Burls and his party were in such bad repute, that some of them did not scruple to say, that if a purse had been lost at all, there were many at the Rising Sun that night who were much more likely to have taken it than Charley Layton. Among the most zealous of his friends were his fellow-workmen at the Farm, especially Forbes and Elliott, who were both so highly incensed against Joe Higgins for having made use of their names to lure Charley to the public-house, that he thought it better not to put himself in their way. These two young men were untiring in their efforts to cheer and encourage Charley during this anxious week, and although they had very good reason for suspecting that he had again taken to his Bible, not a word of ridicule escaped them; indeed, Elliott was heard to say, that if ever he got into uble, he knew he should be glad to fly to the le for comfort too.

The days meanwhile passed sadly, yet all too quickly away. Charley went to his daily labour as usual, and neglected no duty that his master required of him, but he set about his work with a heavy heart, for the hour constantly drew nearer when he knew he should again have to stand, with Groves by his side, and hear Burls's cruel taunting voice raised against him; and yet he was no better prepared than before to prove his innocence; but if he was desponding and unhappy during the day, the evening generally brought him comfort, for then came Mary with her hopeful smile and trusting heart, ready to send up the oft-repeated, but always earnest prayer, that God would be pleased to make their dark path light before them, and bring them safe through all their troubles. From her, wise as she was beyond her years with the wisdom that cometh from above, he learned, by degrees, to believe that it would be better to suffer, being innocent, than to escape punishment with guilt upon his conscience; he saw too, now, that God was dealing with him as a tender father deals with an erring child, for as he again looked back on the last few months, and saw how gradually he had been "inclining to the path of the wicked, and walking in the council of evil men," he could not doubt but that he was being corrected for his profit.

One evening Mary was returning to the Grange from her visit to her brother; she had remained with him rather later than usual, for there were but three more days before that dreaded one, which might separate them for they knew not how long, and she

daily found it harder to take leave of him; to make up for lost time she was walking very quickly, when, on turning a corner, she suddenly found herself face to face with Joe Higgins. Both of them started, and both stopped; Mary, because she wished to speak to him, and Joe, because some sudden emotion, it might be one either of shame or regret at having deceived her brother, arrested his steps; but his eye, as usual, instantly fell beneath hers, and the next moment he was so anxious to escape from her, that, in attempting to do so, he was in great danger of being run over by a horse and cart that was passing; it stopped him, however, and gave Mary an opportunity of saying:

"Joe Higgins! can you tell me if they have found Mr. Burls's purse?"

"Purse! what purse? I'm sure I don't know nothing at all about a purse, Miss Mary." Joe always called Charley's sister *Miss* Mary.

"Why, yes you do, Joe! the purse that was lost the other night at the Rising Sun!"

"Lost was it?" said Joe; "then I'm sure I don't know nothing about it, Miss! I never see it, not I."

"But you might have heard if it had been found," resumed Mary, speaking very quietly; for, with all her anger against this boy, she was too prudent, as well as too timid, to venture a quarrel with him.

"I never asked nobody about it," replied Joe, moving restlessly from side to side, and sending his eyes in every direction but that which lay straight before him. "It doesn't concern me; I never stood

near Phil Burls at all, I didn't. Good night, Miss, I'm in a hurry, it's getting late and I like to keep good hours!" and still avoiding her eye, he crossed the road, and walked rapidly away.

It was on the second morning after this short interview that Mr. Grantley, on turning out the contents of the post-bag, found, among the letters, a small, dirty, ill-folded note, addressed in a very cramped hand to "Miss Mary, at the Squire's." Rather amused at the direction, and wondering, perhaps, who Mary's correspondent could be, he handed it to his wife, who certainly did feel very curious on the subject, but she laid the note aside, intending to give it to Mary when she came downstairs; presently, however, Miss Edith got hold of it, and recalling the delight she had herself experienced from the very few letters that had yet fallen to her lot, and naturally enough supposing that Mary would be equally pleased with one, she ran with it to the nursery, and playfully held it out before the astonished eyes of her young waiting maid.

Mary took the letter from the child's hand, and turned it over two or three times before she attempted to open it; it was the first she had ever received, and its outward appearance was anything but attractive; but when she had broken the seal, which bore, by the by, no other impression than that of the writer's thumb, and began to read the contents, it was some moments before she could make anything of them; they were as follows:—

"Miss Mary,

"I think somehow you know as 'twas me that took Burls's purse, leastways you looked as if you did, when you asked me all them questions about it last night, so I'm not going to stay here and be caught; I'm off to sea, I am; and as I daresay you don't want Charley to go to prison, I own I did it. And if you go to the back of Chaffin's Barn you'll see a heap of dead leaves, and if you dig deep down you'll find it; but I'm not going to give up the money though, 'caus I shall want plenty of that when I get into forrin parts. I don't mean never to come back again, for you always find out everything a fellow does; you did about that shilling of Charley's ever so many years ago.

So Miss Mary, I wish you well,

JOE HIGGINS."

No sooner had Mary mastered the contents of this strange note than she flew downstairs, knocked at the breakfast-room door, and having been told to come in, laid it before the Squire, and then looking towards her mistress with an attempt at a smile, which suddenly changed into a burst of joyful tears, she exclaimed, "Charley is cleared! and now everybody will know it; it was Joe Higgins that stole the purse, after all!"

The note, when read by them, gave little less pleasure to the kind master and mistress of the Grange, than to their young servant, and Mr. Grantley lost no time in acting upon the information it contained. Accompanied by Groves and Mr.

Bradford, he went, in the course of the morning, to Chaffin's Barn, and there, under the heap of leaves, just as Joe had prepared them to expect, lay the purse, empty indeed, but from its foreign manufacture, leaving no doubt upon their minds that it was the one for which they had been searching; and as if to make assurance doubly sure, there was found among the leaves a piece of an old scarlet neck-tie, which Groves immediately recognized as part of one worn by Higgins, when he returned home after his long absence.

On Mr. Grantley's return to the Grange, the now happy Mary was sent to communicate to her brother the joyful tidings that he no longer lay under the suspicion of having stolen the purse; and the outburst of joy and thankfulness with which he received them, proved how deeply he had felt his disgrace. He was not a little surprised, however, to hear that Joe was the guilty party, for he felt positive, he said, that he had never approached near enough to Burls to effect the robbery while he remained in the room. And from several circumstances which came to light afterwards, it was suspected that Burls, in his vindictive desire to avenge himself on Charley for some fancied affront he had received from him, had deposed falsely as to his having had the purse in his possession when he entered the parlour; it had, in all probability, been taken from his pocket at an earlier period of the evening; and as he was on terms of the closest intimacy with most of the frequenters of the Rising Sun, as well as with the landlord himself, it is

likely enough that the robbery would never have been heard of outside its doors, had not Charley's, to him, unaccountable behaviour afforded him the opportunity he had long been watching for of bringing down, as he said, "that youngster's pride!"

The joy of the brother and sister was not, however, without its alloy. Charley could not forget that, with all his faults, Joe had been the companion, the ill-chosen companion as he now too plainly saw, of his boyhood; in his pity for his unfriended state, he had been one of the last to believe that his idle, vagrant habits, were gradually leading him on to an utter disregard of the laws of both God and man. Now, however, there was no longer room to doubt it, and his lightened heart grew heavy again, as he thought of the unhappy lad going from one degree of wickedness to another, until he might be made to feel at last that the way of transgressors is indeed hard. Mary, too, now that she had nothing more to dread from Joe's influence over Charley, could afford to be generous, and sincerely to pity the poor friendless wanderer; and that evening, when she breathed forth again the oft-reiterated prayer that her brother might be kept in the paths of peace and holiness, she did not forget to add a petition that the heart of this poor outcast might be changed, so that he too might "forsake the foolish and live."

At the time appointed Charley was again taken before the magistrates, but as no prosecutor appeared he was discharged, without, as Mr. Grantley was careful to inform the bystanders, the slightest slur

upon his character, to prove which, he related the circumstances that had so unexpectedly led to the discovery of the stolen purse. Before taking leave of him, however, the Squire addressed to him a few kind and friendly words, warning him especially of the danger of throwing himself in the way of temptation, and telling him how many promising youths he had himself seen brought to ruin by carelessness in this respect. "Depend on it, my young friend," he continued, "you will still find yourself beset with snares on every side, for it is the lot of the young and inexperienced to be so; but take my advice, listen to no persuasions, give heed to no counsels that would lead you where your conscience tells you, you ought not to go. Always remember the injunction of the wise man: 'Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it; turn from it and pass away; for they sleep not unless they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall.'"

As Charley listened to these words, the thought passed through his mind, that he more than most others had reason to be thankful that he had been warned in time.

CHAPTER XV.

IN AFTER YEARS.

CHARLEY LAYTON had now escaped a great danger, and he had also learned a most useful lesson: that he who turns from the right path by ever so little, can never tell how far he may be led astray.

As our young readers will probably like to know whether he profited by it or not, we will carry his history forward a few years, and then pay a farewell visit to the Manor Farm; not indeed to the home of its master and mistress, with which we have had little to do, but to that of old Reuben Jones, the bailiff, whom we shall find, at the close of his day's labour, seated beside a bright winter fire, while his active, busy wife is clearing the supper-table, from which he and a young man, apparently their only lodger, have just risen. As Mrs. Jones is a very tidy body, and it will take her some time to put the things away in the perfect order in which she delights to see them, we will take advantage of it to say a few words about this lodger, who is a tall, good-looking young man, with a very pleasant expression of countenance; he is dressed in the usual

garb of a farm labourer, but there is an air of neatness and respectability about his outward appearance not always to be met with, especially on working-days, in those who have to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow; his manner too, as he rises from his seat to assist Mrs. Jones in the removal of some article which he seems to consider too heavy for her aged arm to lift, is so quiet and gentle, that many a one, far his superior in rank, might have taken a lesson in that true politeness which springs from kindness of heart. And the little attention is not thrown away upon her to whom it is offered, for the old woman stops in the midst of her business to lay her hand kindly, almost fondly, on his shoulder, and to say,

"Why, lad, if you go on like that, you'll be making a fine lady of me at last; it's easy enough to be seen that you was brought up to pay respect to old age."

"I've almost always been living with old people you see, Mrs. Jones," returned the young man, "and so it comes natural to me to help them whenever I can; but you're so active, you will scarcely ever accept of help."

"Well, whether I do that or not, I'll back you and your sister Mary against the whole parish, for being always ready to do a service to any as wants it."

From this short conversation it will be gathered that Reuben Jones's lodger was no other than our old friend Charley. Soon after the events recorded in the last chapter, he had, by Mr. Bradford's recommendation, left the Gossets, and taken up his abode

with the bailiff and his wife at the Farm cottage. Old Reuben, as he was even then called, had always been very fond of the boy, and would never believe him guilty of any other fault than the too common one of not being sufficiently careful in the choice of his friends. As he and his wife had no children of their own, except a daughter who had married and gone to America, they were by no means unwilling to receive him, and now, after the lapse of years, they had come to look upon him almost as a son; it was a happy home he had found at last under their roof; he was in greater favour than ever with both his master and mistress; and as much of the business of the Farm, which had formerly devolved upon Reuben himself, was now performed by him; it was generally supposed that, at no very distant time, the old bailiff would be pensioned off, and the younger and more active man appointed to succeed him.

But the last plate has been washed up, and the last crumb swept away, and as Mrs. Jones seats herself opposite her husband in an easy chair, the unexpected sight of which sometimes even now calls a tear into the eye of Mary Layton, Charley takes from a side table a large old-fashioned Bible, neatly covered with black cloth, and having spread it open before him, bows his head reverently over it, as if silently asking a blessing on what he is about to engage in, and begins to read:—

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without

money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live."

As Charley read on his voice slightly faltered, for this was the last chapter he had read to his grandmother, and although many years had passed since, her memory was still associated with it. When he had finished they all knelt down, and the old man offered up a prayer, which, though consisting only of a few short sentences, not very eloquent in themselves, and by no means studied in their arrangement, was so expressive of the feelings of those who worshipped with him, that it called forth not a formal, but a heartfelt, Amen!

When they had reseated themselves, Old Reuben was the first to speak.

"Them's beautiful words you read to us to-night, Charles, and comforting ones too, 'specially that part about God's mercy to us poor sinners."

"Aye! you may well say that," rejoined his wife; "for while he was reading that verse, 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near,' I couldn't help thinking, husband, of the many long years you and I lived without seeking Him; and I do suppose, that if it hadn't been for this good lad here, we should have gone on to our dying day, and never sought Him at all."

"Like enough we should, wife," replied the old man, looking kindly at Charley; "for my own part, I thought no more about Him than the poor senseless

beasts it was my business to tend. Like them, I used to get up in the morning to eat and drink and labour; like them, I laid down at night to sleep; and so long as I got food to eat and clothes to cover me, I was satisfied. I knew I must die at last, because I saw others dying round me; but as for anything that was to come after death, that never concerned me a bit."

"And did no one remind you of it?" asked Charley.

"No! nobody as I know of, and if they did I didn't care to listen to them; I knew that the parson preached of a Sunday, and that master and missus went to hear him, but I'd always plenty to do at home, and I thought 'twas all very well for rich people like them to go where others went, but that I could get on very well without."

"Do you remember the night Charley brought down yon Bible, and asked if he should read to us?" enquired Mrs. Jones.

"Yes! that I do, right well," replied her husband, "for I felt uncommon angry, and had half a mind to tell him that we shouldn't get on long together if he meant to come that over us."

"But you did not tell me so," said Charley, laughing; "on the contrary, I remember you listened very attentively while I read about the Good Shepherd."

"Yes! that was it! it was that that caught me," said the old man, with a smile, "it sounded so natural like to hear of a Shepherd calling His sheep together, and they following because they knew His voice; you see it seemed to come home to me at once,

being as I'd been brought up a shepherd myself, and so the Lord made use of it to soften my hard heart, and praised be His name, I've learned since what it is to hear His voice and follow Him."

"I've often wondered, Charley, what made you choose that particular chapter," said Mrs. Jones. "I'm sure it was lucky you did choose it though, for I don't think my old man would have listened so patiently to any other; he was easily put out of the way in those days, patient as he is now."

"I suppose I must have been directed to it on purpose," said Charley, "for I had no particular motive for choosing it that I know of."

"I think you've hardly ever missed reading a chapter to us of an evening since that time," observed Reuben, "and a many precious chapters I've a'most learnt by heart from hearing you; it was a long while though before I came to care for it as I should. Often and often I should have gave it up if it hadn't been that I felt ashamed of letting such a young boy as you was then, live a better life than I did."

"But then," said Charley, modestly, "I'd so much more cause than almost anybody else had to take heed to my ways, for only think what I had just escaped from; I've often fancied, Master Jones, that if something hadn't happened to draw me from the public-house that first night that ever I went there, I should have took a liking to it and gone again, and then perhaps I might have been ruined in body and soul both. Squire Grantley might well say 'twas just like plucking me out of the fire!"

"Well, you're steady enough now, lad, that's a good thing for you," said Mrs. Jones.

"Thank God He has kept me thus far," said Charley; "but I hope I shall never forget to pray, 'Lead me not into temptation.'"

"I wonder what became of that poor fellow Higgins!" said Reuben.

"I would give almost anything I possess to know that," replied Charley; "he has never been heard of since he started for Australia. Poor Joe! he was very much to be pitied after all, he never had any one to care for him; Mary was saying to me only the other day, that she had never forgiven herself for her unkind feelings towards him. She thinks that both she and I ought to have tried more than we did to reclaim him, seeing that we had been so much better taught than he had, and I think so too now."

"It's a shocking thing for parents to neglect their children as that woman Higgins neglected hers," remarked Mrs. Jones. "When you write again to my daughter for me, Charley, I mean you to put in the letter that I hope she isn't forgetting to bring up that boy of hers properly; tell her that her old father and mother charge her to train him up in the fear of the Lord, and then though they're not likely ever to see him in this world, they'll be hoping to meet him where there will be no more parting."

"I only wish, wife, we'd brought up our own poor girl in that way," said the old man, with a deep sigh; "it would have saved us and her too many a heart-ache."

Charley, to cheer the now drooping spirits of his aged friends, here put in a hope, founded on some part of their daughter's last letter, that she might have learned in America where to go for that true peace, which she had not been led to seek for while at home; and then the conversation ended, and the inmates of the Farm cottage retired to rest.

And where all this time is Mary, the gentle, loving little sister, upon whom Charley had learned to lean so trustfully in the time of trial? not far, we may be sure, from the brother she loved so truly!

Mary still lives at the Grange, where she is now supposed to fill the office of lady's maid! But it would be difficult to say whose servant Mary is not in that house, for from the Squire himself to the last tiny baby, all seemed more or less dependent on her for their comfort. As to Edith and Amy, their home would not seem home to them without Mary, and even Mrs. Grantley herself has been heard to declare, that if her little maid has a day's holiday, everything in the house seems to go wrong. And why is it that she is thus missed? We believe it must be because she has the habit of thinking so much more of others than of herself; and her chief object being to study the comfort of those about her, it follows, as a matter of course, that her absence creates a void which is not easily filled up.

This is the way to win love, and so Mary is much beloved by her employers, and strange to say, by her fellow-servants also, for she is so good tempered and obliging, and has withal so humble an opinion of her-

self, that they forget to envy, as they otherwise might do, the high favor she enjoys with her master and mistress.

Two evenings in the week she still passes with her brother, either at the Grange or at the Farm, and happy as she is at all times, those are her happiest hours; for now she has nothing to fear for Charley; the good seed sown in childhood by the loving hand that has long been cold in death, has, at length, sprung up in both their hearts, and is yielding the precious fruits of righteousness; in the one it had indeed, for a time, lain dormant, but it was only for a time, for the seed of God's Word, when sown in faith and watered with tears, can never fail. And now that the fruit has appeared, Mary joyfully sees that it is ripening to produce, by the Divine blessing, an abundant harvest, for Charley has made up his mind not to be an idle Christian; and having since his residence at the Farm cottage studied the Scriptures earnestly and industriously, he has lately offered himself, and been accepted, as a Sunday-school teacher, and promises to become very useful among children of his own rank in life. He and Mary seldom meet without something or other occurring to lead their thoughts back to their dear old grandmother; and how truly happy does it make them both, to remember that they are now endeavouring to follow in the steps into which she first guided their infant feet, and that looking unto Jesus, and humbly trusting in the merits of His atoning sacrifice, they will, by and by, be reunited to her, whom they still remember with such tender love.

Charley has long given up all his former giddy and thoughtless companions, except Forbes and Elliott, with both of whom he is still on very friendly terms; but it must not be therefore supposed that he is dull and gloomy, for he was never so happy or so cheerful as now. Thanks to the exertions of Mr. Bradford, and the liberality of Squire Grantley in allowing them to play in his Park, a young Labourers' Cricket Club has been established in the parish, the members of which meet every evening during the summer for practice. And there is no young man amongst them who enjoys the game more, or laughs louder at the harmless jokes that are often indulged in, than Charley Layton; but if he hears an oath or a vulgar unbecoming speech, his face again wears the same vexed and troubled expression which it used to do in the days of his early boyhood, and it is surprising the effect it produces on the speaker, who seldom ventures to repeat the offence during that evening at least. Forbes and Elliott are both much altered for the better, especially the latter, who is no longer ashamed to avow himself a Bible reader, and he moreover acknowledges that he owes it to the example of Charley Layton that he is so; indeed Charley told Mary, lately, that he had great hopes that both his friends were becoming anxious enquirers after truth, and if so, we know the promise is, "They that seek Me early shall find Me."

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